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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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IMF raises India's FY26 growth forecast to 7.3%

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

The International Monetary Fund on Monday raised India's GDP growth projection for 2025–26 to 7.3 per cent, a 0.7 percentage point increase from its October estimate, citing better-than-expected economic performance. In its World Economic Outlook update, the IMF also revised India's growth forecast for 2026–27 to 6.4 per cent from 6.2 per cent, while projecting moderation in subsequent years as temporary factors fade. India's GDP grew 8 per cent during April–September 2025–26, supported by 8.2 per cent growth in the July–September quarter. The economy is estimated to expand 7.4 per cent in the current fiscal, up from 6.5 per cent in 2024–25. The IMF said inflation is expected to return close to the RBI's 4 per cent target after easing in 2025 due to softer food prices. *—PTI*

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It's back to ballot for B'luru civic polls after 25 May

88.91L voters on draft lists across 369 wards in 5 corporations

BENGALURU, 19 JAN

Elections to the five City municipal corporations under the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) will be held after 25 May and before 30 June.

The announcement was made by State Election Commissioner GS Sangreshi who also said the polls will be conducted using ballot papers instead of electronic voting machines (EVMs).

Sangreshi said the schedule has been planned to ensure elections are held after the SSLC (Class 10) and PUC (Classes 11 and 12) examinations conclude. The Supreme Court had last week directed the Karnataka government and the State Election Commission to complete Bengaluru local body elections by 30 June.

State Election Commissioner GS Sangreshi at a press briefing on GBA elections in Bengaluru on Monday ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

He said that upcoming zilla and taluk panchayat elections, expected later this year, will also be conducted using ballot papers.

The term of the erstwhile Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) ended on 10 September, 2020, after which the city has been administered by a government-appointed administrator. In September 2025, BBMP was replaced by the Greater Bengaluru Authority, under which the city was reorganised into five municipal corporations — Central, East, West, North and South. Releasing the draft voters' list along with Sangreshi, GBA Election Special Commissioner R Ramachandran said a total of 88,91,411 voters have been included across 369 wards in the five corporations. The electorate comprises 45,69,193 men, 43,20,583 women and 1,635 others, with October 1, 2025 as the qualifying date.

Booth Level Officers will conduct door-to-door verification from January 20 to February 3. Claims and objections can be submitted during this period, with disposal scheduled between February 4 and 18 February. The final electoral roll will be published on 16 March. Ward 23 of Bengaluru West has the highest number of voters at 49,530, while Ward 16 of Bengaluru East has the lowest at 10,926. A total of 8,044 polling booths will be set up. *—PTI*

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Publish names of 'logical discrepancies' in WB SIR: SC to EC

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

The Supreme Court on Monday observed that the ongoing SIR (Special Intensive Revision) in West Bengal should be transparent and not cause inconvenience, and directed the Election Commission (EC) to display the names of those on the "logical discrepancies" list at gram panchayat bhavans and block offices.

The top court directed that the office for submitting the documents and objections shall be set up within the panchayat bhavans or block offices.

"The state government shall provide adequate manpower to the State Election Commission for the deployment at the panchayat bhavans and block offices.

"In this regard, we direct that every district shall meticulously comply with the directions issued by the ECI or the state government for the staff for smooth functioning," a three-bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Dipankar Datta and Joymalya Bagchi observed.

Logical discrepancies in progeny linking with the 2002 voter list include instances of a mismatch in the parent's name and the age difference between a voter and their parent being less than 15 years or more than 50 years. The court noted that 1.25 crore voters in the state figure on the "logical discrepancies" list.

- Logical discrepancies in progeny linking with the 2002 voter list include instances of a mismatch in the parent's name and the age difference between a voter and their parent being less than 15 years or more than 50 years.

The court directed that the director general of police (DGP) of West Bengal shall be obligated to ensure that there is no law-and-order problem and that all the activities shall be completed smoothly.

The apex court was hearing pleas alleging arbitrariness and procedural irregularities in the ongoing SIR exercise in West Bengal, including those related to the "logical discrepancies" category. *—PTI*

SC JUNKS PIL ON JUDICIAL REFORMS

The Supreme Court junked a PIL seeking sweeping judicial reforms, expressing displeasure over what it termed a "publicity interest litigation." The apex court said it should not be used as a platform to address cameras stationed outside. The petitioner, Kamlesh Tripathi had sought a mandate that every court in India must decide a case within a one-year timeframe. The court questioned how it could issue such a direction. *—PTI*

HC denies relief to Sengar in custodial death case

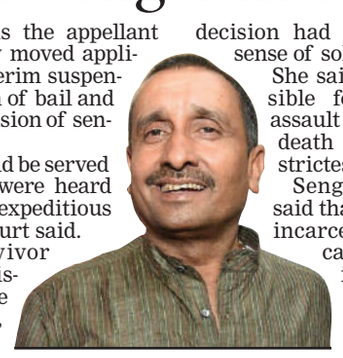
NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

The Delhi High Court on Monday refused to suspend the 10-year jail term of expelled BJP leader Kuldeep Singh Sengar in the custodial death case of the Unnao rape survivor's father due to delay in trial.

The judge observed that while Sengar has undergone incarceration of about seven-and-a-half years, relief could not be granted on the ground of delay alone, as the appellant had repeatedly moved applications for interim suspension, extension of bail and regular suspension of sentence.

Purpose would be served if the appeal were heard on merit in an expeditious manner, the court said.

The survivor expressed satisfaction with the court's verdict, saying the decision had brought her a sense of solace.



She said those responsible for her sexual assault and her father's death must face the strictest punishment.

Sengar's counsel said that his continued incarceration would cause grave and irreparable prejudice as the appeal itself could become infructuous. The court said that Sengar was a key conspirator and that the assault on the deceased and the falsification of the FIR were part of that design. In 2020, a court had sentenced Sengar to 10 years rigorous imprisonment and imposed a fine of Rs 10 lakh, in the case. It had also awarded a 10-year jail term to Sengar's brother, Atul Singh Sengar, and five others for their role in the custodial killing of the rape survivor's father. *—PTI*

After backlash, DKS to attend WEF meet in Davos

BENGALURU, 19 JAN

Days after cancelling his official tour to the Swiss Alpine town of Davos to take part in the WEF meet, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said on Monday that he will attend the event.

He is likely to leave for Davos on Tuesday. "Of course, Delhi has given me permission. My leaders and the CM have also asked me to go there. I have been receiving calls that I should be in Davos. So I'm making it a point to go there," Shivakumar told reporters on Tuesday. The Deputy CM's office on Saturday had said that Shivakumar had cancelled his visit to the World Economic Forum (WEF) meet in Davos, due to pressing engagements.

The BJP had hit out at Shivakumar for cancelling his Davos visit.

Meanwhile, a Government of Karnataka delegation led by the Minister for Large and Medium Industries, M B Patil, departed for Davos on Sunday.

Meanwhile, Iran's Foreign Minister, Abbas Araghchi, will not attend WEF in Davos. The WEF announced on social media, "Although he was invited, the tragic killings of civilians in Iran, means that it is not right for the Iranian government to be represented at Davos this year." *— PTI*

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with Poland's Deputy Prime Minister Radoslaw Sikorski in New Delhi on Monday ***PHOTO: PTI***

Don't fuel terror in India's neighbourhood: EAM warns Poland

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

In a blunt message, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Monday told his Polish counterpart Radosław Sikorski to display "zero-tolerance" for terrorism and not help "fuel" the terrorist infrastructure in India's neighbourhood.

Jaishankar's remarks were apparently over the mention of Kashmir in a Poland-Pakistan joint statement in October last year.

At a meeting with Sikorski, who is on a three-day official visit to India, Jaishankar also expressed his anguish over the unfair and unjustified "selective targeting" of India over the Ukraine conflict, in what is seen as a reference to Western nations' criticism of New Delhi over its energy ties with Russia.

The External Affairs Minister made the comments in his televised opening remarks at the meeting in New Delhi. Sikorski is also Poland's deputy prime minister.

On his part, the Polish foreign minister said he completely agreed with Jaishankar on the "unfairness" and "selective targeting" in the context of tariffs over India's relations with Russia.

"You are no stranger to our region and are certainly familiar with the long-standing challenge of cross-border terrorism," Jaishankar said. *—PTI*

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> **Poland should display zero tolerance for terrorism and not help fuel the terrorist infrastructure in our neighbourhood**
>
> -S Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister

India, UAE plan defence & $200B trade deals

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

India and the United Arab Emirates on Monday unveiled plans for a strategic defence partnership and sealed a long-term LNG deal as Prime Minister Narendra Modi and UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan set an ambitious target of USD 200 billion in annual bilateral trade by 2032.

Modi received Al Nahyan at the Delhi airport, travelling together to the Prime Minister's residence at Lok Kalyan Marg. The three hour visit came amid rising tensions in the Middle East and global trade disruptions triggered by US tariff policies.

Of the five documents signed, the most significant was a letter of intent to establish a strategic defence partnership. The move, announced four months after Pakistan and Saudi Arabia signed a defence pact, envisages cooperation in defence manufacturing, advanced technologies, cyberspace training, special operations, interoperability and counter-terrorism.

PM Narendra Modi receives UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan at Delhi airport and travels with him in a car ***PHOTO: PTI***

Another key agreement provides for Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited to purchase 0.5 million metric tonnes of LNG annually from Abu Dhabi National Oil Company Gas for 10 years beginning in 2028. The UAE is India's second-largest LNG supplier after Qatar. The two sides also agreed to explore collaboration in advanced nuclear technologies, including large reactors and small modular reactors, nuclear plant operations, maintenance and safety. Artificial Intelligence was identified as a priority area, with plans to set up a supercomputing cluster in India and expand data centre capacities through UAE investment. Both leaders directed efforts to link national payment platforms and fast-track initiatives such as Bharat Mart, the Virtual Trade Corridor and Bharat-Africa Setu to promote MSME exports.

Modi also presented traditional Indian gifts, including a hand-carved wooden jhula from Gujarat, symbolising family bonding, aligning with the UAE's declaration of 2026 as the 'Year of Family'. *—PTI*

Blast in restaurant kills 7 in Kabul

KABUL, 19 JAN

At least seven people were killed and about a dozen others injured in an explosion in downtown Kabul on Monday, with security sources saying the attack specifically targeted Chinese nationals.

The blast occurred in the Shahr-e-Naw district of the Afghan capital and appeared to hit a restaurant. Italian medical charity EMERGENCY, which runs a surgical care centre in Kabul, said it received 20 casualties, including seven who were dead on arrival. It said the figures were still provisional.

Initial police reports had described the affected site as a hotel. The cause of the explosion was not immediately known. *—PTI*

NADDA PASSES BATON

Nitin Nabin is youngest BJP National Prez at 45

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

Forty-five-year-old Nitin Nabin was on Monday elected unopposed as the national president of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), becoming the youngest leader to hold the party's top organisational post as it looks to expand its footprint in new regions.

A five-term MLA from Bihar, Nabin emerged as the sole candidate for the position, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other senior party leaders filing nomination papers in his support. He will be formally declared BJP president on Tuesday, succeeding J P Nadda, who has led the party since 2020.

- Nitin entered active politics in 2006 following the death of his father, Nabin Kishore Prasad Sinha.

Senior BJP leader and returning officer K Laxman announced that 37 sets of nomination papers were filed in support of Nabin, all of which were found valid. His proposers included Prime Minister Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari and outgoing party chief JP Nadda. Born in 1980, the same year the BJP was founded, Nitin Nabin entered active politics in 2006 following the death of his father, Nabin Kishore Prasad Sinha, a BJP MLA. His elevation is seen as a generational shift within the party leadership, combining organisational experience with a push for broader outreach. *—PTI*

College bus mows down mother and son in City

BENGALURU, 19 JAN

A 37-year-old woman and her son died after being knocked down by a speeding college bus near Vivek Nagar here on Monday, police said. The incident took place at baround 6.45am, when the woman, an assistant teacher at the Army Public School, and her eight-year-old were crossing the road. Both sustained severe injuries and died on the spot, they added. The college bus driver apparently fled the spot abandoning the vehicle, following the incident and efforts are on to trace him, police said. — *PTI*

GTD insists JD(S) loyalty amid party change speculation

MYSURU, 19 JAN

A day after former minister SR Mahesh's statement in Bengaluru, that party MLA from Chamundeshwari GT Devegowda will not be convinced to stay back in the party, GTD made it clear on Monday that he will continue in the party. Speaking to reporters, he stated that his constituency is very big and he is busy with people's work. On the possibility that Mahesh could be fielded by JD(S) replacing him, GTD, who has stayed away from the party activities for two years and moved close to CM Siddaramaiah, asked his supporters as well as JD(S) workers not to panic as he will continue to focus on the segment. He said that this is not the time to discuss politics as there is much time for assembly elections. —*Salar News*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Protest against PRASAD works at Chamundi Hills

MYSURU, 19 JAN

Chamundi Hills on Tuesday witnessed a protest against development works being carried out under the Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive (PRASAD) scheme. Villagers, shopkeepers and local residents staged a dharna demanding that the works be scrapped immediately. Under tight police security, excavation work is underway on the temple car street, triggering strong opposition. Protesters raised slogans against the district administration and the Chamundeshwari Sri Kshetra Development Authority, alleging that the construction would damage the gopura and temples atop the hill. The agitators said the government must halt the ongoing works taken up under the Union and State government scheme. The PRASAD scheme, launched by the Ministry of Tourism in 2014–15, aims to develop major pilgrimage centres around the hills. —*Salar News*

Biocon CEO disappointed with Hosur airport denial

BENGALURU, 19 JAN

Biocon Executive Chairperson Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw on Monday expressed disappointment over the Centre's reported denial of clearance for the proposed Hosur airport, calling it a setback for south Bengaluru residents. Posting on X, she said she hoped the loss would be compensated by the proposed Kanakapura Road airport site. The Tamil Nadu government's proposal failed to secure Defence Ministry approval as the airspace around Hosur is controlled by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), which requires it for its operations. Sources have said the rejection was conveyed last week, allegedly without detailed discussions. Union Civil Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu clarified that the 150-km aerial distance norm is only a temporary guideline. Karnataka is meanwhile studying three sites, including two along Kanakapura Road, for its second Bengaluru airport. —*PTI*

It is legal: SEC defends use of ballot in civic polls

This comes after Cong govt flagged 'misuse' of EVMs

BENGALURU, 19 JAN

State Election Commissioner GS Sangreshi defended the decision to conduct civic and panchayat elections using ballot papers. He said the choice is legally sound, globally accepted and taken independently by the State Election Commission (SEC).

"Ballot papers were used since the beginning. EVMs have been in use for the last 20–30 years, but using ballot papers is a legally valid and established method," Sangreshi said. Responding to questions on whether the move was influenced by government pressure, he asserted that the SEC is an independent constitutional body. "The law allows elections to be held either using ballot papers or EVMs. The discretion lies with the commission," he said.

He confirmed that elections to zilla and taluk panchayats will also be conducted using ballot papers. Explaining the rationale, Sangreshi said the SEC deliberated on what would be most appropriate in the present scenario. "Many voters in Bengaluru have not seen ballot papers for the last 20–30 years due to EVM use. Ballot papers are also a best practice and are appreciated across the world," he said.

GBA Election Commissioner R Ramachandran, State Election Commissioner GS Sangreshi and Central Corporation Commissioner Rajendra Cholan at a press briefing on GBA elections on Monday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Rejecting the argument that ballot papers signify a regression, Sangreshi said they continue to be used in several elections, including Gram Panchayat, cooperative society and MLC polls. "Using ballot papers does not mean going back to old age," he said.

The commissioner pointed out that while the Supreme Court has upheld the validity of EVMs, it has never ruled out the use of ballot papers. He noted that the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) Act specifically provides for elections through ballot papers. "When there is an Act, why shouldn't we use it?" he asked.

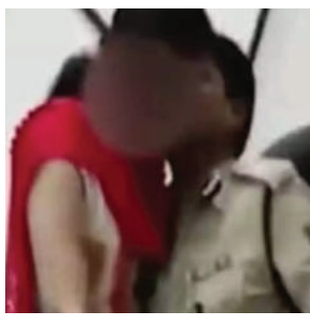
- Ballot papers were used since the beginning. Using ballot papers is a legally valid and an established method, Sangreshi said.

Addressing concerns over rigging, Sangreshi said web cameras and CCTV cameras would be installed, adequate police security deployed and all logistical arrangements ensured.

The remarks come in the backdrop of the Congress government's September decision to recommend ballot papers for future panchayat and urban local body polls, citing erosion of public confidence in EVMs. —*PTI*

DGP Rao under fire for sleazy video

BENGALURU, 19 JAN



Karnataka DGP (Civil Rights Enforcement) K Ramachandra Rao is under fire over a viral video which purportedly shows him in compromising positions with women. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah ordered a probe and warned of disciplinary action.

"No one is above the law, notwithstanding how senior the police officer is," he said.

The controversy is compounded by Rao's family connection: he is the stepfather of Harshavardhini Ranya, alias Ranya Rao, arrested in a high-profile gold smuggling case and currently in Bengaluru Central Jail.

Rao has denied the allegations, terming the footage "fabricated". He said the visuals, reportedly eight years old from his posting in Belagavi, were secretly recorded and are morphed.

Rao attempted to meet Home Minister G Parameshwara to clarify his position, but reports indicate the minister allegedly refused the meeting.

Women and Child Development Minister Laxmi Hebbalkar promised "merciless" action should wrongdoing be confirmed. Senior BJP MLA S Suresh Kumar called the incident an "inexcusable crime" that tarnishes the police department, while activist Dinesh Kallahalli demanded Rao's suspension.

Kannada TV channels have aired blurred images of women purportedly in the video, however, authorities have not yet verified the footage. —*Agencies*

Complaint filed against Minister in excise bribery scandal

BENGALURU, 19 JAN

The Karnataka Lokayukta received a complaint against Minister RB Timmapur over his alleged involvement in an excise bribery scandal.

The development follows the recent arrest of senior excise officials caught accepting a bribe of Rs 25 lakh.

Speaking to PTI on Sunday, the Minister rejected the allegations.

The complainant, Lakshminarayana, alleged that Excise Deputy Commissioner Jagadeesh Naik mentioned the Minister's name in a leaked audio clip.

"Lakshminarayana has lodged a complaint against the Minister alleging that Excise Deputy Commissioner Jagadeesh Naik mentioned his name in the audio clip which has become public," a Lokayukta officer told PTI.

R.B. Timmapur *PHOTO: X*

Lakshminarayana had applied for a CL-7 licence (Hotels and Boarding Houses) and a micro-brewery permit, for which Naik and two others had allegedly demanded a bribe of Rs 80 lakh.

The trio was caught red-handed while accepting a bribe of Rs 25 lakh.

Meanwhile, the leader of the opposition in the Assembly and the Legislative Council, R Ashoka and Chalavadi Narayanaswamy, demanded the resignation of Timmapur.

At a press conference, they played the audio of Naik, in which he mentions the name of the Minister.

The BJP leaders alleged that Naik was referring to the Minister's share in the bribe.

The Minister sought to know why he should be held accountable for someone misusing his name.

Minister Priyank Kharge on Monday dismissed the BJP's demand for the resignation of Timmapur. —*PTI*

7 Hindu activists booked for hurting religious feelings

BELAGAVI, 19 JAN

Police in the State have registered a case against seven people, including Maharashtra-based Hindu leader Harshita Thakur, for allegedly hurting religious sentiments during a procession linked to an "Akhanda Hindu Sammelana" at Machhe village in Belagavi taluk.

According to a complaint filed by Abdul Khader Mujawar, the procession was ahead of the Sunday conference.

When it reached near the Ansari Dargah, Thakur, standing on the bonnet of a vehicle, wearing saffron attire and raising pro-Hindu slogans, allegedly signalled the vehicle to halt and made gestures resembling the act of shooting an arrow towards the dargah. The complainant alleged that the act hurt the religious sentiments of his community.

The complaint claimed that Thakur delivered a provocative speech at the conference with the intention of inciting religious sentiments.

Based on the complaint, police registered the cases against seven people including the organisers of the event, Supreet Simpi, Shrikant Kambale, Bettappa Tarihal, Shivaji Shahapurkar, Gangaram Tarihal and Kallappa, under relevant sections at the Belagavi Rural Police Station.

Meanwhile, Muslim community members staged a protest on Monday, condemning the incident. —*Salar News*

K'taka objects border issue case with Maharashtra

BELAGAVI/BAGALKOT, 19 JAN

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday said the State has formally objected to Maharashtra's jurisdiction in the border dispute case filed in the Supreme Court. He asserted that the state has no locus standing in the matter.

Maharashtra has approached the apex court seeking the merger of Belagavi with its territory, a long-standing and contentious issue between the two states. He said the Karnataka government would engage a competent lawyer to contest the matter.

On reports that nearly three crore voters in Karnataka were not mapped during the Election Commission of India's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise, the Chief Minister said the Congress had cautioned party workers and voters to be vigilant. He denied politicising the issue, stating that the party's sole concern was to ensure genuine voters were not excluded from electoral rolls.

Siddaramaiah said his party also favoured conducting municipal corporation elections using ballot papers. On the Governor returning the bill on internal reservation among Scheduled Castes, he said the government would provide suitable explanations to the questions raised.

- Maharashtra has approached the apex court seeking the merger of Belagavi with its territory, a long standing issue between the two states.

Responding to BJP MLA G Janardhana Reddy's allegation that the Congress government was "looting" the state, Siddaramaiah said Reddy had "no moral right" to make such claims, noting that cases against him were still pending.

Meanwhile, in Bagalkote, the Chief Minister said development in the Badami Assembly constituency would continue under the present government. —*PTI*

CM & I have made a decision: DKS

BENGALURU, 19 JAN

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar indicated on Monday that the leadership row involving himself and CM Siddaramaiah has been discussed by the two in the presence of the Congress high command, and that they have arrived at a decision. Time will reveal everything, he added.

Shivakumar asserted that he has the support of 140 legislators, including CM Siddaramaiah.

"I go (to Delhi) for politics and government affairs. There are reports in the media that I did not get an appointment with Rahul Gandhi. One day you show pictures of me talking to Rahul Gandhi and Kharge. Then there are reports that I couldn't meet anyone," Shivakumar said in response to a question on his visit to New Delhi.

On his brother DK Suresh's statement that the high command will give good news, he said, "My brother is saying, and also party workers and you are saying it."

On his supporters having "huge" expectations, he said, "140 MLAs support me, including the Chief Minister."

"Do you know what the CM and I discussed? We know what we have discussed in front of Rahul Gandhi and what we have decided together. There is a time for everything. Time will answer everything."

Asked about the "good news" that is is expected in April, Shivakumar said, "Let's see, why discuss it now." — *PTI*

SP caught kicking biker on camera

MYSURU, 19 JAN

A video showing a senior police officer attempting to kick a motorcyclist while managing traffic for Chief Minister Siddaramaiah in Suttur, near Mysuru went viral on social media on Sunday.

The incident occurred as the Chief Minister was returning after attending a festival event that drew thousands of people, triggering massive traffic congestion on narrow roads.

Mysuru Superintendent of Police Mallikarjuna Baladandi stepped onto the road to help clear a path for the Chief Minister's convoy. During the operation, he lost his temper when a biker allegedly tried to cut the queue and was seen attempting to kick him. The moment was captured by bystanders and quickly circulated online.

A video shows Mysuru Superintendent of Police Mallikarjuna Baladandi kicking a biker when he tried to cut the queue *PHOTO: X*

Siddaramaiah had inaugurated an agricultural seminar at the fair around 1.30pm and left soon after to attend the funeral of his friend, Narsegowda. Police faced difficulty managing the crowd and traffic, with long queues stretching for several kilometres there. —*Agencies*

BACTERIAL INFECTION SYMPTOMS

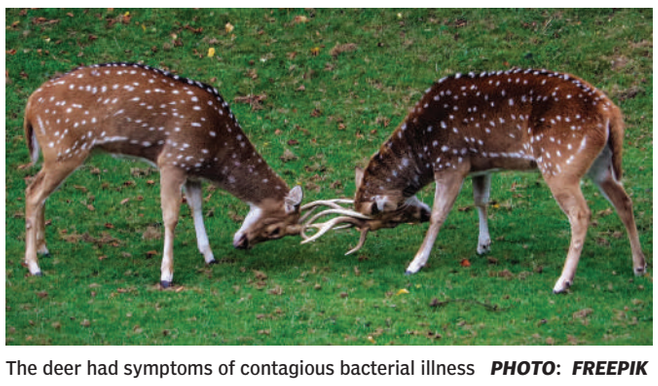
4 deer die in Davanagere zoo; public entry restricted

DAVANAGERE, 19 JAN

Four spotted deer have died at the Indira Priyadarshini Mini Zoo near Anagodu in Davangere over the past three days, prompting a temporarily close of the facility.

According to officials, the first death was reported on January 16, followed by two more on 17 January. Another deer died on 18 January, taking the toll to four. The mini zoo houses 170 spotted deer — 94 females, 58 males and 18 fawns.

Following the initial death, forest officials immediately implemented Standard Operating Procedures. After the subsequent deaths, members of the Animal Health Advisory Committee inspected the site and sent blood samples and organs for laboratory analysis to determine the exact cause. Based on preliminary symptoms, the committee suspects a contagious bacterial disease, Hemorrhagic Septicaemia (HS).



The deer had symptoms of contagious bacterial illness *PHOTO: FREEPIK*

Forest Department officials have sanitised the zoo, enforced strict biosecurity measures and begun prophylactic and preventive treatment for the remaining animals in consultation with senior veterinarians. Continuous monitoring has been put in place. Officials in Davangere are also in touch with their counterparts in Belagavi, where 31 of 38 blackbucks died in November 2025 due to a highly contagious bacterial outbreak, to prevent any possible spread.

Deputy Conservator of Forests Harshavardhan said the zoo would remain closed until further orders and urged public cooperation.

Meanwhile, the Assam State Zoo and Botanical Garden has taken winter precautions, installing heaters, stubble and high-powered bulbs for animals —*Salar News*

Cops crack Rs 10 cr inter-state dacoity case in 2 weeks

MYSURU, 19 JAN

Mysuru police have cracked an inter-state dacoity case within two weeks, on theft of gold jewellery worth Rs 10 crore from a jewellery showroom in Hunsur.

Two accused have been arrested in Bihar, while a search is on for eight more suspects. The case was solved by investigation teams comprising 50 police personnel, with assistance from the Bihar Police and Special Task Force.

Superintendent of Police Mallikarjuna Baladandi said the arrested men are Rishikeshkumar Singh of New Delhi and prime accused Pankajkumar Singh of Bihar. Both are repeat offenders, including murder and theft, registered in multiple states.

The robbery took place on 28 December, when armed robbers stormed the Sky Gold and Diamonds showroom in broad daylight and fled within four minutes. Police recovered some gold ornaments, Rs 1 lakh in cash and a stolen motorcycle. The accused had stayed in Hunsur and Periyapatna lodges using fake Aadhaar cards. —*Salar News*

Sriramulu reveals rape survivor's name, booked

BALLARI, 19 JAN

An FIR has been filed against **former minister B Sriramulu** under the POCSO and Juvenile Justice Acts for allegedly disclosing the identity of a minor survivor. The incident occurred during a mega protest rally on 17 January, where Sriramulu targeted the Siddaramaiah-led Congress government in Karnataka regarding the state's deteriorating law and order situation, following recent clashes in Ballari that resulted in a fatality.

The police registered the case at the Ballari Women Police Station, citing Sections 23(1) and 23(2) of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, as well as Section 74 of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015.

In response to the FIR, Sriramulu's close associate and MLA G. Janardhan Reddy stated that the case had been initiated based on a complaint by an inspector at the Ballari APMC police station and affirmed, "We will face whatever it is in accordance with law."

- Police registered the case at the Ballari Women Police Station

During the rally, BJP leaders demanded the arrest of Congress MLA Nara Bharat Reddy in connection with the recent unrest in Ballari and called for the investigation to be handed over to the CBI. Tensions in Ballari escalated on the night of 1 January after a clash between supporters of Congress MLA Nara Bharath Reddy and BJP MLA G Janardhan Reddy over a banner installation issue. This altercation led to violence, including stone-pelting and gunfire, resulting in the death of a Congress worker. —*PTI*

Selective targeting of India unfair & unjustified: EAM

Jaishankar also held talks on the upswing in India-Poland ties

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

Ahead of a crucial visit by the top leadership of the European Union to India, India on Monday made it known in no unclear terms to Poland, a Central European country, that it should desist from the selective targeting of India.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, who held a one-on-one with the visiting foreign minister of Poland, Radosław Sikorski, currently on a three-day visit to India, implicitly referred to his visit to Pakistan last year in October.

In late October, Sikorski travelled to Islamabad and held wide-ranging talks with Pakistan Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, following which a joint statement was issued that featured the Kashmir issue.

United States Senator Steve Daines with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar during a meeting, in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

"In the recent past, both in New York last September and in Paris this January, I have candidly shared with you our views on the Ukraine conflict and its implications," Jaishankar said.

"While doing so, I have also repeatedly underlined that the selective targeting of India is both unfair and unjustified. I do so again today," he added.

In his remarks, Jaishankar also talked about the upswing in India-Poland ties and underlined the need for exchanging views and perspectives on issues amidst a global churning.

"We meet at a time when the world is under considerable churn," Jaishankar said, recalling Prime Minister Narendra Modi's trip to Poland in August 2024. He said the visit saw the relationship elevated to a strategic partnership status.

"Poland is one of India's largest trading partners in Central Europe," Jaishankar said. He mentioned Maharaja Digvijaysinhji Ranjitsinhji Jadeja of Nawanagar, who provided shelter, food and education to over 650 Polish children fleeing Soviet oppression during World War II. *—PTI*

Nearly 2,500 artistes to perform at R-Day parade

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

Representing different dance forms of India, a mega group of nearly 2,500 artistes is set to perform on the Kartavya Path here during the 77th Republic Day parade, whose main theme will be the sesquicentenary of 'Vande Mataram'. The members of the creative team that has worked on it include —MM Keeravani, who composed the famous song 'Naatu Naatu' from the film 'RRR', as music director, Subhash Sehgal as lyricist, Anupam Kher as narrator and Santosh Nair as choreographer, under the overall direction of Sandhya Purecha. 'VVIP' and other labels will be named after Indian rivers, senior officials said on Friday. President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and Presi-dent of the European Council, Antonio Costa, will be the chief guests along with 10,000 people. *—PTI*

Mulayam's son claims wife ruined family ties

LUCKNOW, 19 JAN

Prateek Yadav, son of Samajwadi Party founder Mulayam Singh Yadav, has accused his wife, BJP leader Aparna Bisht Yadav, of destroying his family ties and announced he will seek a divorce. Aparna Yadav is currently vice chairperson of the Uttar Pradesh State Commission for Women. In a post on Instagram, Prateek described her as "selfish" and "driven by fame and influence," saying her actions have left him in poor mental health. "I have never seen such a bad soul, and I was unfortunate to get married to her," he wrote. Prateek is the son of Mulayam Singh Yadav's second wife, Sadhna Yadav. Aparna had contested the 2017 Assembly elections on an SP ticket before joining the BJP in 2022. Both parties have not yet commented. *—PTI*

Stalin lays foundation for ₹343 cr reservoir

CHENNAI, 19 JAN

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Monday laid the foundation stone for the Rs 342.60 crore Mamallan reservoir project near Nemmeli aimed at augmenting the drinking water resources for Chennai. This will be the sixth dam for the city, which depends on Poondi, Cholavaram, Puzhal (Red Hills), Chembarambakkam, and Kannankottai-Thervoy Kandigai. In addition, the Veeranam lake and a few desalination plants, too, meet the requirement. The project has been planned taking into account the ever-expanding boundaries of Chennai and will be etched in history, he remarked

"This project will ensure 17 crore litres of water per day to Chennai and 6,605 crore litres per year and it is spread across 5,161 acres of land," he said. *—PTI*

Kavitha discusses launching political party with PK

HYDERABAD, 19 JAN

K Kavitha, former Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao's daughter, is in talks with election strategist Prashant Kishor about launching her own political party in Telangana, Telangana Jagruthi sources revealed. Kavitha, president of Telangana Jagruthi, a cultural organisation, recently held discussions with Kishor during his five-day visit to Hyderabad. Kishor is also the founder of Bihar-based Jan Suraaj. Kavitha discussed her plans to establish a new political platform and explore the political landscape in Telangana. Since her suspension from BRS in 2025, she has been focusing on public issues under Telangana Jagruthi. *—PTI*

Stampede: CBI grills Vijay for 6 hours

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

The CBI questioned TVK Chief and actor Vijay for over six hours at its headquarters here for the second time in connection with the Karur stampede case, which claimed lives of 41 people, officials said.

A visibly relaxed Vijay came out of the CBI headquarters in his luxury SUV after questioning was completed at around 5pm, got down and waved at his supporters and media, before leaving for the five-star hotel where he was staying.

The actor-turned politician was earlier quizzed by the CBI on 12 January. He was asked to come again on 13 January, but the actor sought another date due to Pongal, after which the agency summoned him on Monday, they said. He said they are cooperating with the investigating agencies, and no summons for further questioning has been issued. Vijay was questioned by a team of officials led by a deputy superintendent rank officer drawn from the agency's anti-corruption wing, the officials said.

Several questions related to decision-making about the rally, reasons for his delay, continuation of speech, his knowledge about the chaos, turnout and mismanagement of the crowd were put forth to him, they said. *—PTI*

TVK Chief and actor Vijay leaves from CBI headquarters after 6 hours of questioning linked to the Karur stampede case, in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

RSS and BJP are centralising power, RaGa claims in Kerala

LoP in the Lok Sabha and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi during a Mahapanchayat of newly elected party local body representatives, in Kochi, on Monday **PHOTO: PTI**

KOCHI/SULTANPUR, 19 JAN

Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday accused the RSS and the BJP of attempting to centralise power, while asserting that his party believes in decentralisation and strengthening grassroots democracy.

Speaking at a Mahapanchayat of newly elected Congress local body members here, he said the grand old party brought the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments to empower the three-tier Panchayati Raj system.Gandhi also alleged that the NDA government was "attacking" the MGNREGA because it was implemented through local self-government institutions.

He stressed that protecting the Constitution also meant protecting decentralised governance at the grassroots level. The basic principle of democracy was that votes are the voice of citizens and that this voice must be protected, he added.

Drawing a contrast, Gandhi said the BJP and RSS stood for centralisation, while Congress stood for decentralisation.

He also congratulated Congress workers and UDF for what he described as a strong performance in the local body elections in Kerala, especially at the panchayat level, the third tier of democracy.

Meanwhile, Gandhi did not appear before the MP-MLA court here on Monday in connection with a defamation case against him, as he was in Kerala. The court fixed 20 February as the next date of hearing, a lawyer said. *—PTI*

FIR filed over forged letter in Sonowal's name

GUWAHATI, 19 JAN

Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said on Monday that an FIR has been lodged over a forged letter circulated on social media ahead of Assembly elections in Assam.

The document, purportedly on his official letterhead and carrying his signature, urged a "course correction" and was addressed to the BJP's national president. Sonowal said the letter was completely fake, calling it a serious criminal offence involving forgery, impersonation and misuse of official government identity.

In a post on X, he said miscreants circulated the letter with malafide intent to spread misinformation and discredit a constitutional authority.

An FIR has been lodged and law enforcement agencies have been asked to investigate the case on priority and take strict legal action. Sonowal advised the public and media not to rely on or circulate the letter and to verify information only through official sources. His office earlier lodged a complaint at Parliament Street police station in New Delhi. The matter surfaced hours earlier on Monday evening. *—PTI*

Maharashtra DyCM Eknath Shinde during a public rally for the upcoming BMC elections, in Mumbai **PHOTO: PTI**

Lottery to decide quota for Mumbai Mayoral post

MUMBAI, 19 JAN

Amid heightened expectations and drama, the Maharashtra government has set the ball rolling for the election of mayors to Mumbai and 28 other civic bodies, with the lottery for the mayoral post scheduled for 22 January.

The Urban Development Department has issued an order stating that the draw of lots will be held at the state secretariat.

In Mumbai, the BJP has emerged as the largest single party in the elections held on 15 January, winning 89 of the total 227 seats in the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), wresting control from the Thackerays after 30 years.

BJP's ally, Shiv Sena, led by Deputy CM Shinde, secured 29 seats. Speculation over political realignments for the mayoral post emerged after the results showed that the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) emerged as the second largest party, winning 65 seats, while its ally MNS got six.

Mumbai will have a Mahayuti mayor, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde said on Monday, dismissing reports of new political equations after the results of civic polls were declared last week.

"Shiv Sena and BJP had fought the Mumbai civic elections as an alliance, and therefore, the Mahayuti's candidate would become the mayor," Shinde told reporters. Meanwhile, Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut on Monday questioned the shifting of corporators-elect from the ruling ally Shiv Sena to hotels.

Eknath Shinde is clear that the Shiv Sena will honour the mandate for the BJP-led Mahayuti in the BMC, sources said, adding that the shifting of 29 corporators-elect of his party to a five-star hotel in Mumbai was being unnecessarily hyped. *—PTI*

6 injured as BJP, KVA workers clash

THANE, 19 JAN

Six persons, including two police personnel, were injured during a clash between workers of two rival parties in Bhiwandi town of Maharashtra's Thane district. Activists of the Konark Vikas Aghadi, a local political outfit, allegedly hurled stones and ransacked BJP party office during the violence on 18 January, forcing police to resort to a lathicharge to restore order. Violence broke out at Shivaji Chowk between these activists, apparently triggered by tensions following the recent Bhiwandi Nizampur Municipal Corporation elections. *—PTI*

PMK's dispute escalates as Ramadoss camp moves HC

CHENNAI, 19 JAN

The Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) leadership dispute has intensified, with **S Ramadoss**'s camp filing multiple legal petitions.

The founder's faction has lodged a suit in the Madras High Court to declare Ramadoss as party president, countering his son Anbumani's claim to lead the organisation. A separate petition seeks a stay on Anbumani's electoral pact with AIADMK for the 2026 Assembly elections.

Additionally, a writ petition requests the Election Commission's letter on the party symbol mango, sent last year to Anbumani's camp, be rerouted to Ramadoss. Advocate K Arul stated Anbumani's claim to the presidency is false, asserting his father's election and that Anbumani's term expired on 28 May, 2025. The EC confirmed Ramadoss's leadership, not recognising Anbumani as chief, and admitted it had not declared him as such. The Ramadoss faction accused Anbumani of misrepresentation and impersonation, seeking a civil declaration of Ramadoss's presidency and an injunction against Anbumani's alliance with AIADMK. *—PTI*

'MURDER OF DEMOCRACY'

BJP plans to remove voters in Rajasthan, alleges Cong

NEW DELHI,19 JAN

The Congress on Monday alleged that the BJP in Rajasthan was conspiring to "fraudulently" remove from the electoral rolls the names of voters who support the opposition party, and said it will not allow "murder of democracy" in the state.

The Opposition party also demanded that there should be a forensic probe of forms used for removal of electors in Rajasthan.

Rajasthan Congress chief Govind Singh Dotasra said that in his state, after the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls process, the draft list that was released showed that 45 lakh people were found to be "absent, shifted, or deceased", and objections were then invited until 15 January.

"Until 3 January, there was no chaos, and the entire system was running smoothly. However, on 3 January, BJP's National General Secretary (Organisation) BL Santosh visited Rajasthan, held a meeting there, and then the process of fraudulently adding and removing votes began," Dotasra alleged at a press conference along with Leader of Opposition in Rajasthan Assembly Tikaram Jully.

Rajasthan Congress chief Govind Singh Dotasra **PHOTO: PTI**

"I am sharing data with you that I obtained from the Election Commission's website. It shows that from 17 December to 14 January, the BJP, through 937 Booth Level Agents (BLAs), submitted applications to add 211 names and remove 5,694 votes. Meanwhile, the Congress party, through 110 BLAs, submitted applications to add 185 names and remove two names," Dotasra said.

- In Jhunjhunu, 13,882 Form 7 applications for name removal were received in a single day, in Mandawa, 16,276 were received, in Udaipurwati, 1,241 were received and in Khetri, 1,478 were received, he claimed. Meanwhile, 1,40,000 forms have already been registered, Dotasra added.

In Jhunjhunu, 13,882 Form 7 applications for name removal were received in a single day, in Mandawa, 16,276 were received, in Udaipurwati, 1,241 were received and in Khetri, 1,478 were received, he claimed.

Meanwhile, 1,40,000 forms have already been registered, Dotasra added. *—PTI*

Netaji's grandnephew flays WB SIR

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's grandnephew Chandra Kumar Bose on Monday criticised the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal, calling the exercise important but poorly executed. Appearing before SIR hearings, Bose said the process lacked clarity and amounted to "sheer harassment" of common voters. He told PTI that he, his wife and daughter appeared on 16 January, while his two sons, who are abroad, authorised them to represent them. *—PTI*

WB Minister summoned for hearing

West Bengal minister Tajmul Hossain was summoned for a hearing under the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, a senior official of the Election Commission said on Monday.

The notice for the hearing was sent to the three-time MLA because of discrepancies between his name and that of his father in the 2002 electoral roll, the official said. Hossain, the minister of state for micro, small & medium enterprises and textiles, was asked to appear for the hearing at 10.30 am on 29 January with all relevant documents. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Elephant tramples man to death in Jharkhand

BOKARO, 19 JAN

A vegetable dealer was trampled to death by an elephant in Jharkhand's Bokaro district. The incident occurred near Simrabeda Mahto Tola in the Mahuadanr police station area late on Sunday, when the jumbo attacked him, a police officer said. "The man, on his way home, encountered the elephant at Kander. Locals claimed that he was carrying vegetables in the four-wheeler. The jumbo took him out of the vehicle with the trunk and then trampled him to death," Bokaro divisional forest officer Sandeep Sinde said. —*PTI*

ED summons YSRCP MP Midhun in AP liquor case

HYDERABAD, 19 JAN

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has summoned YSRCP MP P V Midhun Reddy for questioning in a money-laundering case linked to a Rs 3,500-crore liquor "scam" in Andhra Pradesh that allegedly took place during the YSRCP dispensation, officials said on Monday. The 48-year-old YSRCP Parliamentarian from Rajampet has been asked to appear at the ED's zonal office here on 23 January. He was named as an accused and arrested by the Andhra Pradesh Police special investigation team (SIT), which probed the case, in July 2025. He is out on bail currently. —*PTI*

Air quality turns severe in New Delhi

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

Delhi choked under a blanket of smog on Monday morning, with the average Air Quality Index (AQI) settling at 417 in the 'severe' category. As per the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) Sameer app, AQI data for one station was not available while writing this report. Wazirpur, which recorded an AQI of 474, had the worst air quality among all stations. The air quality was 'severe' at 25 stations, and 'very poor' at 14 stations. No improvement in air quality is likely in the next two days. —*PTI*

Man murders his live-in partner, burns body

JHANSI, 19 JAN

A woman, 33, was murdered with an axe allegedly by her live-in partner, who then burnt her body inside a large trunk, police said on Monday.

The murder came to light on Sunday due to the alertness of a loader driver while the accused was attempting to dispose of the body.

Police arrested the main accused, a retired railway employee, Ram Singh Parihar, 63, along with his second wife, Geeta, 50, and son Nitin, 19, for assisting in destroying evidence.

Parihar had married Geeta while his first wife was still alive and was living with her and his children in the Sair Gate area. Later, he developed a relationship with Preeti Ahirwar, 33, the wife of Rajkumar. Preeti left her husband and three children and began living with Parihar.

SSSP BBGTS Murthy said police received information early on Sunday about a suspicious trunk. Police found partially burnt human remains inside. Nitin said that he had brought the trunk from his father's house and that it contained Preeti's remains. Geeta told police that Parihar had killed Preeti after disputes over money.

The SSP praised the loader driver, saying he would be honoured with a certificate, and announced a reward of Rs 25,000 for the Sipri Bazaar police team for cracking the case within hours. He added that although the victim has been identified, samples from the remains have been sent for DNA testing. — *PTI*

DGCA fine on Indigo won't ensure safety: Pilots fume

Safety can't be traded off for Rs 22.20 crore, says FIP

MUMBAI, 19 JAN

The Federation of Indian Pilots, FIP, on Monday criticised aviation regulator DGCA for imposing a 'very meagre' penalty of Rs 22.20 crore on IndiGo for the large-scale flight disruptions that impacted lakhs of travellers in December, saying that the safety of passengers and aircraft cannot be 'traded off.'

FIP questioned the flight cancellation period considered in the probe by the regulator, and said the penalty amount is "very, very meagre."

The DGCA on Saturday announced the enforcement actions after a detailed probe.

It slapped penalties totalling Rs 22.20 crore on IndiGo for cancelling thousands of flights in early December, and warned airline CEO Pieter Elbers and COO Isidre Proqueras. It also ordered the removal of the Senior Vice President for Operations Control centre (OCC), Jason Herter, for non-compliance.

Indigo's services were disrupted nationwide last month creating problems for passengers PHOTO: PTI

Between 3 and 5 December, the DGCA said, 2,507 flights were cancelled, and 1,852 flights were delayed, impacting over 3 lakh passengers.

The DGCA has imposed a penalty of Rs 20.40 crore for the non-compliance for 68 days from 5 December 2025, to 10 February 2026. The amount translates to a Rs 30 lakh fine for each day during the period.

The DGCA cited the over-optimisation of operations, inadequate regulatory preparedness, along with deficiencies in system software support, as among the primary reasons for the disruptions.

The FIP cited the example of the US Department of Transport, and said it imposed a penalty of USD 140 million on Southwest Airlines for multiple violations of consumer protection laws during the Christmas holidays in December 2022 and distributed the amount to affected passengers.

"The DGCA report and action is a joke. What is the action taken here? They have not punished anyone. Civil Aviation Minister K Rammmohan Naidu said in Parliament that strong action will be taken. Does it mean only a warning? A warning is issued only for smaller mistakes. In this case, there was a national crisis. And they have issued only a warning and moved just one OCC head," the FIP's president G S Randhawa said. —*PTI*

Rescue workers and members of the public gather at the spot in Noida where software engineer Yuvraj Mehta died in an accident PHOTO: PTI

Noida techie death: Top babu removed

NOIDA, 19 JAN

The Uttar Pradesh government removed the Noida Authority CEO and ordered an SIT probe into the death of software engineer Yuvraj Mehta, after his car plunged into a water-filled pit at a construction site in Noida, amid mounting outrage over the incident and allegations of official and builder negligence.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath took cognisance of the incident and directed the constitution of a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to investigate the circumstances leading to the fatal accident and submit a report within five days.

Shortly after, the state government shunted out Lokesh M, a 2005-batch senior IAS officer, from the post of Noida Authority CEO and placed him on a waitlist.

Lokesh M, who had assumed charge as Noida Authority CEO in July 2023, after replacing Ritu Maheshwari, also served as the de facto MD of the Noida Metro Rail Corporation (NMRC). A dentist from Karnataka, he had earlier served as the divisional commissioner in Kanpur and Saharanpur. Lokesh had ordered the dismissal of a junior engineer and issued show-cause notices to other officials responsible for traffic-related works in Sector 150.

In an official statement, the Authority removed junior engineer Naveen Kumar of the Noida Traffic Cell from service and sought detailed reports on the allotment and construction activities of the developer, Lotus Greens. The CEO also directed all departments to inspect safety measures at construction sites.

A UP Irrigation Department letter to the Noida Authority in 2023 that flagged the need to construct head regulators to flush out accumulated rain and drain water in Sector 150 has been accessed by PTI. A Noida Authority official said he was not aware of the letter.

As per the CM's directions, a three-member SIT headed by Additional Director General (ADG), Meerut Zone, Bhanu Bhasker, has been constituted. Meerut Divisional Commissioner Hrishikesh Bhaskar and Public Works Department Chief Engineer Ajay Verma are members of the panel. SIT member Ajay Verma said that the panel would visit Noida on Tuesday.

The action follows the death of Yuvraj Mehta, who was killed early on Saturday after his car skidded in dense fog, broke a drain boundary and fell into a deep, waterlogged pit dug for a basement at a construction site near a drain.

Mehta, a resident of Tata Eureka Park society, worked with a Gurugram company and was returning home at night. — PTI

Paratrooper killed in Kashmir, hideout busted in Kishtwar

JAMMU, 19 JAN

A paratrooper, Havildar Gajendra Singh, who was injured in the gunfight with terrorists, succumbed on Monday, while the search uncovered a suspected terror hideout packed with rations for winter in Kishtwar district, officials said.

The operation was launched in Sonnar village near Mandral-Singhpora in the Chatroo belt on Sunday, where an encounter broke out between security forces and terrorists in which eight soldiers were injured due to splinter from a grenade.

The operation was suspended Sunday night and resumed early Monday in the challenging terrain with thick vegetation and steep slopes, limiting visibility and movement, officials said.

In a post on X, the White Knight Corps said 'Operation Trashi-I' continues in Chatroo. "The cordon has been tightened. Troops along with the police and the CRPF have been deployed."

A security officer during a search on Monday to track down and neutralise terrorists, in the Kishtwar district of Jammu and Kashmir PHOTO: PTI

Teams of the Army, police, and the paramilitary aided by drones and sniffer dogs, are combing the area, officials said.

They said search teams busted a terrorist hideout and recovered a large quantity of food near the site of yesterday's gunfight.

A group of two to three terrorists allegedly affiliated with Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) are believed to be hiding in the area, officials said, adding the operation resumed with the first light of day and was going on when last reports were received. —*PTI*

Gas pipeline bursts in Cuttack, causes panic

CUTTACK, 19 JAN

A gas pipeline burst in Cuttack's CDA area on Monday during construction work, triggering panic among local residents, police said. The incident occurred in Sector 9, where many former judges and senior advocates of the Orissa High Court live. Emergency teams were rushed to the site to carry out immediate repairs and ensure public safety.

Officials reported that an earthmover struck an underground pipeline owned by the Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL) while excavating, causing it to rupture. The resulting LPG leak alarmed residents, prompting authorities to quickly cordon off the area and take safety measures to prevent any accidents or explosions. —*PTI*

CANNABIS FROM THAILAND

Sikkim man nabbed in Rs 13,000 cr drug case

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN:

The Special Cell of the Delhi Police has apprehended a man from Sikkim in connection with a massive Rs 13,000 crore drug trafficking case, sources said on Monday.

The accused, identified as Tilak Prasad Sharma, 40, was allegedly involved in supplying cannabis sourced from Thailand for the same syndicate. The source said that the arrest is linked to a major crackdown carried out on 2 October, 2024, when cocaine and cannabis worth around Rs 13,000 crore were seized while being smuggled into multiple locations in Delhi, Gujarat and Punjab by a Dubai-based cartel.

This comes weeks after a key drug supplier, Ritik Bajaj, was caught in Dubai and brought back to India by the authorities.

Deputy commissioner of police (Special Cell), Kaushik said Tilak Prasad Sharma was arrested in Sikkim and brought to Delhi. "Sharma had brought a consignment of around 40 kg of Thai marijuana from Thailand at the direction of Ritik." — *PTI*

Food poisoning hits 125 guests at Thane event

THANE, 19 JAN

Around 125 people fell ill from suspected food poisoning at a pre-wedding 'haldi' ceremony in Kalyan, Thane district, Maharashtra, on Sunday. Guests began experiencing nausea, vomiting, and stomach discomfort shortly after the meal and were rushed to hospitals and clinics.

DCP of Police Atul Zende confirmed that all affected individuals received timely treatment and has returned home. The caterer, who supplied the food from Ahmedabad, has been called for questioning. Meanwhile, samples of the food served at the event have been sent for analysis. —*PTI*

SC stays Rajasthan HC order on shifting liquor shops near NHs

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

The Supreme Court on Monday stayed the Rajasthan High Court's order directing the state to remove or relocate all liquor shops within 500-metres of national or state highways due to a surge in fatal road accidents.

A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta, which issued notice on pleas filed by liquor vendors and Rajasthan government, however, said that the HC's "concern was genuine" and the government may consider it in future.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the state government, said that the SC had earlier directed that there should not be any liquor vends within 500 metres of national and state highways, but a problem arose where these roads passed through the city.

"The order was later clarified that within municipal limits, there would not be any such ban on liquor shops," he said. Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for liquor vends owners, said that the HC had erred in passing the order without hearing the parties, and sought a stay. —*PTI*

MP told to decide on Minister's trial

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

The Supreme Court on Monday directed the Madhya Pradesh government to decide within two weeks on sanctioning the prosecution minister Vijay Shah for his objectionable remarks targeting Army officer Colonel Sofiya Qureshi. Shah faced an SC-appointed SIT probe for and "objectionable" remarks against Col Qureshi. A bench comprising CJI Surya Kant and Justices Datta and Bagchi noted that the SIT has submitted its report. —*PTI*

SHE DIED AWAITING JUSTICE

Kukis demand justice for gangraped woman

CHURACHANDPUR, 19 JAN

Several organisations demanded justice for a Kuki woman from Manipur, who died recently from illness allegedly linked to the trauma she suffered after being gangraped during the early phase of the ethnic violence in the state in 2023.

The Kuki organisations based in Manipur's Churachandpur and Delhi claimed that she was kidnapped in Imphal and gangraped in May 2023. She, however, escaped from the kidnappers, but never fully recovered from the shock and injuries and died on 10 January while undergoing treatment in Guwahati.

The groups also demanded a separate administration for the Kukis, claiming that it was not possible for them to live with the Meitei community any longer.

People gather for a candlelight vigil in Churachandpur demanding justice for a Kuki woman who died recently after being gangraped in 2023. PHOTO: PTI

At least 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in the violence between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and hills-based Kuki-Zo groups in Manipur since May 2023.

The state has been under President's Rule since February last year.

In a statement, the Kuki group Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum (ITLF) said, "Her death is yet another painful testimony to the ruthless manner in which the Kuki-Zo people have been targeted." The Kuki-Zo people "now have no other option but to demand a separate administration for our safety, dignity, and survival", said the ITLF.

The Kuki Students' Organisation (KSO), Delhi & NCR, alleged that despite the seriousness of the crime and by civil society organisations, no meaningful action was taken against the perpetrators. — *PTI*

2 girls, woman abducted in UP's Ballia; 3 booked

BALLIA, 19 JAN

Three men were booked in the alleged abduction of two teenage girls and a woman in separate incidents here in Uttar Pradesh's Ballia.

According to the police, a 16-year-old girl from a village in Bairia had gone to appear for an examination on 17 January, when her neighbour Raj Kumar, 22, allegedly abducted her. When her father went to Kumar's house to complain about the matter, he was beaten up and chased away by the latter's father, Siyar Katan and other family members.

Based on a complaint filed by the girl's father, a case was registered against Kumarand his family, Bairia circle officer, Mohammad Qureshi said.

In another incident, Raju Gupta, a resident of Chakra Golhuwa village, allegedly abducted a 17-year-old girl from the Nagra area on the afternoon of 18 January. Acting on a complaint filed by the girl's brother, police have registered a case against Gupta.

In the third incident reported, an 18-year-old woman from a village in the Ubhanv area had gone to a shop on the morning of 7 January, when Golu, a resident of the nearby Maryadpur Rampur village in Mau district, allegedly abducted her.

- Police said a 16-year-old girl from Bairia had gone to write an exam on 17 January, when her neiighbour Raj Kumar, 22, allegedly abducted her

— *PTI*

CUBBON PARK BLOOMS

Colourful blooms create a cheerful spectacle for visitors at Cubbon Park in Bengaluru on Monday, as rosea, fiery red gulmohar, bright yellow tabebuia argentea and trees burst into full bloom, lending a vibrant spring charm to the City's green heart
PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

Mid-day meal cooks protest Rs 66 pay/day in Raipur

Nearly 95 per cent of the protesters are women, many from rural and tribal areas, who say their labour keeps classrooms running, even as their own households remain on the brink ***PHOTO: PTI***

It's been 22 days since thousands of mid-day meal cooks, mostly women, have been protesting in Chhattisgarh capital Raipur, demanding a hike in their daily wages from Rs 66 to over Rs 400.

Nearly 95 per cent of the protesters are women, many from rural and tribal areas, who say their labour keeps classrooms running, even as their own households remain on the brink.

These cooks, the key workforce behind one of the government's ambitious nutrition schemes, have been protesting under the banner of the 'Chhattisgarh School Madhyanh Bhojan Rasoiya Sanyukta Sangh'.

"Why is the government playing with our lives?" asked Savita Manikpuri (38), who travelled from Kanker district to join the agitation.

A cook since 2011 at a government middle school in Dudhawa village, Manikpuri recalled starting on a monthly honorarium of Rs 1,000, later raised to Rs 2,000 during the previous Congress government.

"Governments change, but our situation doesn't. How do we survive on Rs 66 a day?" she asked while talking to PTI on Monday.

"I have two children. My daughter has finished school, but I can't afford to send her to college. My son is in Class 11. They have dreams. I don't know how to fulfil them," she said.

Meghraj Baghel (45), the protesting association's secretary, said around 87,000 cooks work under the mid-day meal scheme in the state, and since December 29, they have been on an indefinite strike, a move he claimed has disrupted meal services in several schools.

Groups of cooks arrive in batches from different districts, stay for a few days, and then return home, replaced by others. On any given day, 6,000 to 7,000 cooks sit in protest, he claimed.

Baghel said he has been associated with the scheme since its launch in October 1995.

"We began at Rs 15 per day. After 30 years, we are still at Rs 66. Our demand is simple - pay us the collector rate, around Rs 440 per day," he said.

Baghel claimed the state government has done nothing for the cooks.

They are paying monthly wages of only Rs 2,000, that too for 10 months in a year. In contrast, cooks in other states receive significantly higher wages for the same work- Rs 21,000 per month in Puducherry, Rs 12,000 in Kerala, Rs 6,000 in Lakshadweep, Rs 4,000 each in Madhya Pradesh and Haryana, he said.

Baghel said that given the crushing inflation, it is becoming increasingly difficult for them to make ends meet.

Beyond wages, the cooks say their jobs are precarious.

"When schools are merged, or student strength declines, cooks are often removed. We have given our entire lives to this work. If a school closes, where do we go?" Baghel asked, demanding that they be given alternative employment within the government setup.

Another protester, Bhuneshwari Markam (40) from Mathuradih village of Dhamtari district, has been cooking mid-day meals for 15 years.

"We reach school for work by 9 am and leave after 3 pm. Cooking, serving, washing utensils - it takes five to six hours. Yet the government says we work only two hours," she rued.

Markam's family depends on her income and her labourer husband's daily wages.

"We don't have farmland. This is our main source of income. We feed other people's children, but we cannot properly feed our own. Education, clothes, even basic needs are a struggle," she added.

Many women at the protest site spoke of long-term health problems due to smoke, as in rural areas, meals are often prepared on firewood stoves due to the unavailability of cooking gas cylinders.

The women said they will continue to stage the protest until the government listens to their demands.

Pramod Ray, the association's media in-charge, who works as a cook at a school in Nawagaon village of Bemetara district, also highlighted the health hazards faced by cooks, especially in rural areas where food is still prepared on firewood stoves due to the unavailability of cooking gas.

"Many suffer from eye problems and respiratory illnesses. My mother, who earlier worked as a mid-day meal cook, has been suffering from a heart-related ailment and has been under treatment for 6-7 years. In the rainy season, the work conditions worsen. Despite years of service, we are treated like bonded labourers," he claimed. The state education department officials could not be contacted for a response despite repeated attempts. State Congress chief Dipak Baij visited the protest site on Monday and extended support to the demands of the cooks. *—PTI*

SALAR سالار

'Billionaires have 4,000 times more chance at politics'

Oxfam said the billionaire wealth jumped by over 16 per cent in 2025, while it has increased by 81 per cent since 2020 ***PHOTO: AI***

As the rich and powerful from across the world start filling snow-clad lanes here, a new study said billionaires are 4,000 times more likely to hold any political office than ordinary people.

It also said their wealth jumped three times faster in 2025 than the past-five-year average to a record high of $18.3 trillion. In Indian currency, it translates to more than Rs 1,660 lakh crore.

Hours before the 56th World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2026 begins in this Swiss ski resort town, rights group Oxfam International released its own annual inequality report to highlight that the ever-deepening wealth divide was also sparking dangerous political inequality.

The meeting is being attended by over 3,000 global leaders, including more than 60 heads of state or government, as part of an over 400-strong political leadership presence in this small town in the Alps.

Oxfam International said the billionaire wealth jumped by over 16 per cent in 2025, while it has increased by 81 per cent since 2020.

"This comes as one in four people don't regularly have enough to eat, and nearly half the world's population live in poverty," it added.

The report, titled 'Resisting the Rule of the Rich: Protecting Freedom from Billionaire Power', analysed how the super-rich were securing political power to shape the rules of our economies and societies for their own gain and the detriment of the rights and freedoms of people around the world.

Oxfam said the surge in billionaire wealth coincided with the US Trump administration pursuing a pro-billionaire agenda, as it has slashed taxes for the super-rich, undermined global efforts to tax large corporations, reversed attempts to address monopoly power and contributed to the growth of AI-related stocks that have provided a boon to super-rich investors worldwide.

Trump is among the top global leaders attending the WEF. Oxfam said the Trump presidency has sent a clear warning sign to the rest of the world about the power of the ultra-rich and rising oligarchy, which is undermining societies worldwide rather than being solely a US phenomenon.

It said the collective wealth of billionaires last year surged by $2.5 trillion, almost equivalent to the total wealth held by the bottom half of humanity, or about 4.1 billion people.

This increase itself would be enough to eradicate extreme poverty 26 times over, it pointed out.

The number of billionaires topped 3,000 last year for the first time, while the richest, Elon Musk, became the first ever to surpass half a trillion dollars.

"The widening gap between the rich and the rest is, at the same time, creating a political deficit that is highly dangerous and unsustainable," Oxfam Executive Director Amitabh Behar said. It cited a 'World Values Survey' of 66 countries that found that almost half of all people polled say that the rich often buy elections in their country.

Billions of people are being left facing avoidable hardships of poverty, hunger and death from preventable diseases because the system is rigged against them, while one in four people worldwide face food insecurity, having to regularly skip meals, Oxfam said. It further said civil liberties and political rights are being rolled back and suppressed, while last year there were more than 142 significant anti-government protests across 68 countries, which authorities typically met with violence.

"Being economically poor creates hunger. Being politically poor creates anger," Behar said.

The chances of democratic backsliding through, for example, the erosion of the rule of law or the undermining of elections, are seven times more likely in highly unequal countries, the Oxfam report said.

Oxfam further said governments are allowing the super-rich to dominate media and social media companies, as billionaires own more than half the world's largest media companies and all the main social media companies.

It cited Jeff Bezos' purchase of the Washington Post, Elon Musk with X, Patrick Soon-Shiong with the Los Angeles Times and a billionaire consortium buying large shares of The Economist.

In France, Far-Right billionaire Vincent Bollore now controls CNews, rebranding it as the French equivalent of Fox News. In the UK, three-quarters of newspaper circulation is controlled by four super-rich families.

The report further flagged that only 27 per cent of top editors globally are female and just 23 per cent belong to racialised groups.

Oxfam called on governments to prioritise realistic and time-bound National Inequality Reduction Plans, effectively taxing the super-rich to reduce their power, and ensuring stronger firewalls between wealth and politics. It also sought accountability for political empowerment of ordinary citizens, including stronger protection for people's freedoms of association, assembly and expression and for civil society organisations and trade unions. *—PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Nabin rose through the ranks

MLA at 26 and BJP president at 45, Nitin Nabin's ascent has been nothing short of storybook. Elected unopposed on Monday as BJP's youngest National President, his elevation signals a clear generational shift as the party looks to further consolidate its grip on national politics.

A low-profile but seasoned leader, Nabin is a five-term MLA from Bihar and the state's Public Works Department minister. He was appointed BJP working president on 14 December, a move that ended prolonged speculation over who would succeed veteran JP Nadda and surprised political circles amid buzz of differences between the BJP and its ideological mentor, RSS, over the appointment. The unassuming leader, who now has the task of steering the party through a packed electoral calendar, including Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Assam due in April, has hit the ground running. The first BJP chief from Bihar, Nabin has toured several states since his appointment, delivering a sharp and direct message to party workers.

"Politics is not a 100m race but a long marathon. It is not a test of speed but of patience and stamina," he has repeatedly told cadres. In Bihar, he urged workers to think beyond immediate electoral gains. "We have to unfurl bhagwa from panchayat to Parliament... unlike part-time politician Rahul Gandhi, who comes during polls and goes to Germany for holidays," he said.

BJP National Working President Nitin Nabin addresses the beneficiaries of VB G-RAM-G Scheme on 11 January ***PHOTO: PTI***

The upcoming state elections will be a crucial test for Nabin, who rose through the ranks of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha, to prove his mettle as the organisational head of the party pyramid.

Nabin entered mainstream politics in 2006 after the death of his father, Navin Kishore Sinha, a veteran BJP leader with close RSS ties. Forced to leave his studies midway, he was initially seen as an outsider. Two decades on, he is regarded as a grounded organisation man.

Now 45, Nabin has won five consecutive elections from the Bankipur seat, often by huge margins. He impressed the central leadership as BJP co-in-charge of the 2023 Chhattisgarh Assembly elections, where the party scored a surprise win, and repeated the success in the Lok Sabha polls, winning 10 of 11 seats in the state. He joins a distinguished line of BJP presidents, from Atal Bihari Vajpayee and LK Advani to Amit Shah, succeeding Nadda, who held the post since 2020. *—PTI*

Nadda ends tenure with strong legacy

After Jagat Prakash Nadda took over as the BJP's 11th national president six years ago, rising steadily through the ranks over a period of three decades, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had expressed confidence that the party would scale new heights under his leadership.

True to that trust, Nadda delivered a notable legacy, leading the party as it consolidated strongholds and expanded its footprint despite occasional setbacks, before handing over the baton to his successor Nitin Nabin, elected unopposed as the new BJP Chief on Monday.

During his tenure, the BJP secured a series of wins in the assembly polls. While the party wrested Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan from the Congress, it ended Naveen Patnaik's 24-year rule as Odisha chief minister by decimating the BJD in the assembly elections.

Under Nadda's stewardship, the BJP also returned to power in Delhi in 2025 after more than 26 years by inflicting a crushing defeat on the Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP in the assembly polls.

The BJP stormed to power in Haryana for a third consecutive term and pulled off a stunning performance in Maharashtra, winning a record number of seats and propelling ruling Mahayuti to a landslide victory.

Union Minister and BJP National President JP Nadda arrives at party headquarters for the election of BJP's new National President ***PHOTO: PTI***

The NDA's thumping victory in the Bihar assembly polls towards the end of 2025 consolidated the BJP's electoral dominance under Nadda's watch after the BJP's underwhelming performance in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

When Nadda assumed the party's reins on 20 January, 2020, the BJP was in power in 15 states, with its chief ministers in just seven. Today, the party holds power in 20 states and Union Territories alongside its partners in the NDA, and has its chief ministers in 14 of them.

Nadda's ability to deliver these results stems from a long journey rooted in his early political activism and years of experience in building, managing and running political structures.

Born to Krishna and Narain Lall Nadda in a Brahmin family on 2 December, 1960, Nadda did his schooling from St Xavier's school in Patna and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Patna University.

Nadda's journey so far has been a striking testament to discipline, conviction and unwavering dedication to public life, according to BJP leaders. He was just 15 when he participated in a relay fast in a movement spearheaded by Jai Prakash Narayan against the then Congress chief minister of Bihar Abdul Gafur.

In 1991, Nadda became the national president of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM) and came in touch with the then BJP chief Murli Manohar Joshi.

Nadda won the assembly election from the Bilaspur seat, contesting on the BJP ticket, and became the Leader of the Opposition in the Himachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly in 1993. He was re-elected from the seat in 1998 and became a cabinet minister in the BJP government for the first time.

In 2010, the BJP appointed Nadda as the party's national general secretary after Nitin Gadkari took over as the BJP chief. When Amit Shah took the reins of BJP as its national president in 2014, Nadda was also made a member of the party's parliamentary board, the highest decision-making body of the organisation. Nadda eventually took over as BJP chief in 2020.

After BJP-led NDA returned to power for a third consecutive term under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership in 2024, Nadda was appointed as Union minister for Health and Family Welfare as well as Chemicals and Fertilisers. *—PTI*

2025 minority incidents non-communal: Bangladesh

NEW DELHI/DHAKA, 19 JAN

- The clarification came in a statement issued days after India, on 9 January, pressed Dhaka to "swiftly and firmly" deal with attacks on minorities in B'desh

The interim government in Bangladesh, led by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, on Monday claimed that the majority of incidents of killings and violence involving minority communities in 2025 were 'criminal in nature' and not driven by communal motives.

The clarification came in a statement issued by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus' Press Wing, days after India, on 9 January, pressed Dhaka to "swiftly and firmly" deal with attacks on minorities in Bangladesh and described as "troubling" the attempts to attribute the incidents to extraneous reasons.

Citing a yearlong review of official police records, the interim government said a total of 645 incidents involving minority communities were recorded between January and December 2025 across Bangladesh.

"While every incident is a matter of concern, the data presents a clear and evidence-based picture: the overwhelming majority of cases were criminal in nature rather than communal," it said.

The statement reiterated that ensuring safety and justice for all citizens, including Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and people of other beliefs, remains a constitutional and moral obligation.

The statement came ahead of the 12 February general elections in Bangladesh, amid the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) apprehensions about holding free and fair elections in the country by the Election Commission.

BNP secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir urged the Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin on Sunday to work with "complete impartiality" in the conduct of polls. "However, we are now observing certain issues where arrangements appear biased, and conduct raises concerns. We have urged the commission to act with complete impartiality," he said. *—PTI*

Police try to stop Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal activists as they protest outside the High Commission in Bangladesh **PHOTO: PTI**

Putin invited to join Gaza Peace Board: Kremlin

MOSCOW, 19 JAN

Russia on Monday confirmed that President Vladimir Putin has received an invitation to join US President Donald Trump's proposed Gaza Peace Board, saying it is under consideration.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov confirmed this.

Washington has projected the Peace Board as a new international body aimed at promoting peace and stability in Gaza, with speculation that its remit could extend to other global conflicts.

Russian state broadcaster Channel One said the initiative was being viewed in Moscow as a US attempt to create a rival to the United Nations with a broader mandate. Invitations were sent to PMs Narendra Modi and Shehbaz Sharif.

Don's price on peace

US officials report that members of Trump's 'Board of Peace' can secure a permanent seat by paying $1 billion. *—PTI*

UK PM: Trade war in no one's interest

Says island's future belongs to Denmark

LONDON, 19 JAN

- Starmer emphasised that alliances are built on respect and partnership, not pressure, arguing that disputes should be resolved through calm dialogue rather than tariffs against allies

Amid US President Donald Trump's threats to impose sweeping tariffs on Denmark and other European allies over Greenland, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Monday opposed using tariffs against allies. "A trade war is in no one's interest," Starmer added.

At a press conference on Greenland, Starmer emphasised that alliances are built on respect and partnership, not pressure, arguing that disputes should be resolved through calm dialogue rather than tariffs against allies.

Trump warned that tariffs could rise to 10 per cent from 1 February and 25 per cent from 1 June if no deal was reached, calling the move necessary for national security and saying it was "time for Denmark to give back" after years of US support.

Keir Starmer **PHOTO: PTI**

"Any decision about the future status of Greenland belongs to the people of Greenland and the Kingdom of Denmark alone. That right is fundamental, and we will support it," Starmer asserted.

He reaffirmed the UK's support for Denmark, calling it a close ally and a committed NATO member that has made significant sacrifices alongside its partners.

Starmer further emphasised the importance of Greenland's security, saying, "The security of Greenland matters, as climate change reshapes the Arctic. As sea routes open and strategic competition intensifies, the High North will require collective defence. The United States will be central to that effort, and the UK stands ready to contribute through NATO." *—ANI*

'Greenland threat due to Nobel snub'

Trump writes he's not 'obligated to peace'

WASHINGTON DC, 19 JAN

A letter shared by PBS News correspondent Nick Schifrin explicitly links US President Donald Trump's security interests and the Nobel Peace Prize to American control of Greenland.

Addressing Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre, Trump asserts that Norway's failure to award him the Peace Prize has altered his approach to global affairs and alliance politics.

The letter begins with Trump expressing resentment over not winning the Nobel Peace Prize, which is awarded by a committee appointed by Norway's parliament, with Trump telling Støre that because the prize was not awarded to him, "I (Trump) no longer feel an obligation to think of Peace, but can now think about what is good for America."

Pro-Greenland protesters at a rally, another mocks Trump's MAGA slogan with 'Make America Go Away' cap **PHOTO: SCREENGRAB**

The message then turns towards Greenland, the autonomous territory of Denmark that Trump has said the US must acquire. Trump questions Denmark's legal claim to the island saying, "Denmark cannot protect Greenland from Russia or China, and why do they have a 'right of ownership' anyway?"

Trump then ties the acquisition to NATO burden-sharing, framing his demand as a deserved reciprocal obligation from European allies. "I have done more for NATO than any other person... now, NATO should do something for the US," Trump wrote.

He added: "The World is not secure unless we have Complete and Total Control of Greenland. " *—ANI*

Prince Harry back in court to battle British tabloids

LONDON, 19 JAN

Prince Harry returns to London's High Court this week for the final phase of his lawsuit against British tabloids, seeking damages worth millions. The Duke of Sussex leads high-profile claimants, including Elton John and Elizabeth Hurley, accusing Associated Newspapers Ltd of unlawful information-gathering and privacy breaches, claims the publisher calls "preposterous." The nine-week trial marks Harry's second time in the witness box after becoming the first senior royal in over a century to testify in 2023. Harry blames the press for Princess Diana's 1997 death and attacks on Meghan. Filed in 2022, a judge said the claims have prospect of succeeding. ***—PTI***

Hackers air Pahlavi on Iran channels

DUBAI, 19 JAN

Hackers disrupted Iranian state television on Monday amid nationwide protests, briefly airing footage backing exiled crown prince Reza Pahlavi and urging security forces not to "point your weapons at the people".

The intrusion hit several satellite channels of state broadcaster Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, showing Pahlavi and images of police, while claiming without evidence that some officers had laid down arms.

Reza Pahlavi **PHOTO: X**

"I have a special message for the military. You are the national army of Iran, not the Islamic Republic army," Pahlavi said. "You have a duty to protect your own lives. Join the people as soon as possible."

Videos circulated on social media platforms outside Iran, likely shared via Starlink to bypass internet restrictions, and were also distributed by Pahlavi's campaign. Iran's crackdown has killed at least 3,919 people, according to the Human Rights Activists News Agency. *—PTI*

In this screengrab provided by Guardia Civil, rescue workers at the scene after a high speed train collision, in Spain, on Monday **PHOTO: PTI**

HIGH-SPEED TRAINS COLLIDE IN SOUTHERN SPAIN, AT LEAST 39 KILLED

MADRID, 19 JAN

- Approximately 500 passengers were on board the two trains during the accident

A high-speed train derailed and collided with an oncoming train in southern Spain, resulting in at least 39 fatalities and numerous injuries, officials reported.

The incident occurred on Sunday evening when a train travelling from Malaga to Madrid derailed near Cordoba, subsequently crashing into a train coming from Madrid to Huelva. Approximately 500 passengers were on board the two trains during the accident.

Antonio Sanz, the health minister for Andalusia, indicated that there are concerns the death toll could exceed 38, as rescue operations continue. He confirmed that 73 injured passengers have been transported to six different hospitals. "At least one passenger carriage had rolled down a four-metre slope," he noted.

Francisco Carmona, the firefighter chief of Cordoba, described the wreckage as severely damaged, with four cars off the track. "The situation at the crash site is very serious," stated Sanz. Civil Protection chief Maria Belen Moya Rojas added that rescuers faced challenges reaching the scene.

Local residents have been assisting with blankets and water for the victims. Spain's military emergency relief units were deployed alongside the Red Cross to support healthcare officials. ADIF announced that train services between Madrid and Andalucía would be suspended on Monday. *—PTI*

Karachi mall blaze leaves 26 dead, 65 still trapped

KARACHI, 19 JAN

The death toll from a fire at Gul Plaza in Karachi has risen to 26 after rescue teams recovered eight more bodies from the rubble. The blaze broke out on Saturday night at the wholesale and retail market, which had shops across the basement, mezzanine, and three upper floors, and was controlled by Sunday evening. Six people died immediately from suffocation, while dozens were injured. Rescue 1122 COO Abid Jalal said the building, weakened by the fire, remains at risk of collapse. Sindh Governor Kamran Tessori said 65 people are still trapped. Authorities suspect an electrical short circuit. Karachi has faced repeated fires due to poor safety. ***—PTI***

Guatemala orders emergency after deadly prison riots

ESCUINTLA, 19 JAN

Guatemala has declared a 30-day state of emergency after gang members killed at least seven police officers and took dozens of hostages across three prisons. The unrest began on Saturday when authorities limited privileges for gang leaders, including Aldo Duppie, head of the Barrio 18 gang. Police and military raids early Sunday freed all hostages held at prison in Escuintla. Retaliatory attacks by gang members followed, leaving 10 officers wounded and one gang member dead. Interior Minister Marco Antonio Villeda linked the killings to gang reprisals. President Bernardo Arevalo announced mourning, and emphasised of not yielding to criminal threats. ***—PTI***

DOJ probes protest disrupting church linked to ICE official

MINNEAPOLIS, 19 JAN

The US Department of Justice said Sunday it is investigating protesters in Minnesota who disrupted a church service at Cities Church in St. Paul, where a local Immigration and Customs Enforcement official is listed as a pastor.

A livestreamed video shared by Black Lives Matter Minnesota shows demonstrators interrupting the service, chanting "ICE out" and "Justice for Renee Good," referring to the 37-year-old mother fatally shot by an ICE agent in Minneapolis earlier this month amid heightened immigration enforcement.

Protesters allege Pastor David Easterwood also leads the ICE St. Paul field office overseeing controversial operations.

Assistant Attorney General Harmeet Dhillon said DOJ is examining possible federal civil rights violations "by these people desecrating a house of worship," adding, "A house of worship is not a public forum for your protest." Attorney General Bondi said any federal law violations would be prosecuted. *—PTI*

Jake Lang, (centre), who organised the protest, clutches his head as he leaves the rally near Minneapolis City Hall, on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

'60 Minutes' airs previously pulled Don deportation report

CBS's '60 Minutes' aired on Sunday a report on Trump administration deportations that had been abruptly pulled a month earlier, sparking claims of political pressure. The segment examined migrants sent to El Salvador's CECOT prison and included statements from the White House. - PTI

Trump-approved AI voice used in new Fannie Mae ad

An advertisement for Fannie Mae features an AI-generated voice resembling President Donald Trump, disclosed by a disclaimer and used with his permission. The narration promotes an "all new Fannie Mae" as housing affordability dominates the administration's agenda. The spot was aired Sunday. - PTI

People celebrate as Syrian government take control of the town from the Democratic Forces **PHOTO: PTI**

Syria govt takes control after heavy fighting with SDF

DAMASCUS, 19 JAN

The Syrian government announced a ceasefire with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) on Saturday, ending days of fighting and effectively closing the chapter on Kurdish-led autonomy.

Mediated by US Special Envoy Tom Barrack, the deal restores Damascus's authority across all of Syria and integrates the US-backed SDF into the national army.

The agreement follows two weeks of clashes after talks on merging the SDF collapsed last year, despite the removal of Bashar al-Assad in December 2024 and the rise of President Ahmed al-Sharaa. Government forces advanced rapidly, capturing Tabqa, the Euphrates Dam and key oil and gas fields in Raqqa and Deir Az Zor.

Under the 14-point deal, the state regains control of Raqqa, Hasakah and Deir Az Zor, including borders, prisons and energy assets. SDF units will be dissolved, with fighters absorbed individually into defence and interior ministries, while non-Syrian members linked to the PKK must leave.

In return, Damascus issued concessions, recognising Kurdish rights, language and holidays, restoring citizenship to stateless Kurds and allowing Kurdish participation in governance. The US called the pact a "pivotal moment" for unity. *—Agencies*

Japan PM dissolves Parl, calls for snap elections

TOKYO, 19 JAN

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi on Monday announced the dissolution of the House of Representatives, clearing the way for a snap general election on the opening day of the ordinary Diet session, Kyodo News reported.

The decision, taken on Friday, marks Takaichi's first major electoral gamble since becoming Japan's first woman PM on 21 October.

At a press conference, Takaichi said she would seek a fresh mandate and effectively staked her continuation in office on the election outcome. Ruling party leaders said voting is expected on 8 February, with the official campaign beginning 27 January.

The election will be the first test of the Liberal Democratic Party-led coalition formed a day earlier with the Japan Innovation Party. Takaichi aims to capitalise on strong cabinet approval ratings to secure support for what she calls a "responsible yet aggressive" fiscal policy approach.

The snap poll comes less than 18 months after the October 2024 lower house election. While Diet members serve four-year terms, Japan's constitution allows early dissolution. Opposition parties criticised the move as politically driven. *—ANI*

POST 1-CHILD POLICY

China's population falls as births drop 17%

BEIJING, 19 JAN

China's population has declined for a fourth consecutive year, with births in 2025 falling to a record low, according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

Births dropped 17 per cent year-on-year from 9.54 million in 2024 to 7.92 million, nearly 10 million fewer than a decade ago.

The figure marks China's lowest birth count since 1949 and follows its loss of status as the world's most populous country to India in 2023.

The demographic downturn is compounded by rising deaths and rapid ageing. About 11.31 million people died in 2025, among the highest tolls in five decades.

Citizens aged 60 and above now account for over 23 per cent of the population, or roughly 323 million, a number projected to exceed 400 million by 2035.

The crisis is widely attributed to China's decades-long one-child policy, scrapped in 2016 amid economic warnings.

Authorities have since introduced pro-birth measures, including annual childcare subsidies of up to 10,800 yuan (Rs 1.41 lakh) per child.

China Population Association vice-president Yuan Xin linked the record low births to a sharp decline in marriages. *—PTI*

Rupee ends 14P lower at 90.92 against USD

MUMBAI, 19 JAN

The rupee breached the 91-a-dollar mark for the second time in a month before ending 14 paise down at 90.92 (provisional) against the greenback on Monday, as renewed concerns over global trade uncertainties accelerated foreign fund withdrawal. Despite weak American currency and lower crude oil prices, selling pressure in domestic equities pushed the Indian currency downward, forex analysts said.At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 90.68 and slid past the crucial 91.01 against the greenback. It finally settled 14 paise lower at 90.92 (provisional) against the dollar, just 1 paise above its record low closing level. On Friday, the rupee crashed 44 paise to settle near its lowest level at 90.78 against the US dollar, after losing 17 paise in the preceding two sessions.

The dollar index, which measures the greenback's strength against six currencies, traded 0.23 per cent lower at 98.97. —*PTI*

Tech Mahindra shares rise by 4% post Dec earnings

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

Shares of IT services firm Tech Mahindra rose nearly 4 per cent on Monday after the company reported a 14.11 per cent increase in net profit for the December quarter of FY26. The stock advanced 3.80 per cent to Rs 1,734.05 on the BSE and 3.85 per cent to Rs 1,734.90 on the NSE. The results were announced after market hours on Friday. The Mahindra Group Company posted a profit of Rs 1,122 crore, compared with Rs 983.2 crore in the year-ago period. Revenue from operations increased to Rs 14,393 crore from Rs 13,286 crore a year earlier. During the quarter, Tech Mahindra secured new deals worth USD 1.096 billion. CEO and MD Mohit Joshi said the deal pipeline remains robust across all geographies and verticals.—*PTI*

BHEL's Q3 profit surges threefold to Rs 390 crore

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) on Monday posted a three-fold jump in consolidated net profit to Rs 390.40 crore for the December quarter, mainly due to increased revenues from key sectors. The company had clocked a net profit of Rs 134.70 crore in the October-December period of the preceding 2024-25 fiscal, as per an exchange filing. BHEL's total income rose 18 per cent to Rs 8,691.85 crore during the third quarter from Rs 7,385 crore in the year-ago period. From the power segment, the company earned a revenue of Rs 6,322.36 crore compared to Rs 5,588.45 crore a year ago. BHEL achieved a revenue of Rs 2,150.74 crore in October-December, up from Rs 1,688.64 crore in the year-ago period. —*PTI*

Govt partially lifts ban on export of wheat flour

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

The government has permitted the export of up to five lakh metric tonnes (LMT) of wheat flour and related products, partially easing a ban that has been in place since 2022. The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) said in a notification dated 16 January, that exports will remain prohibited beyond this quantity. Exporters must obtain prior authorisation from the DGFT. The first round of applications will be accepted from 21 January to 31 January, 2026. Thereafter, applications will be invited during the last ten days of each month until the permitted export quantity is fully allocated. Each export authorisation will be valid for a period of six months from the date of issue. Eligible applicants include flour mills and processing units having valid Import Export Code (IEC) and FSSAI licences operating as manufacturer-exporters.—*PTI*

Reliance shares fall 3% post Q3 earnings announcement

The firm reported a flat net profit of Rs 18,645 crore in Q3

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

Shares of Reliance Industries Ltd declined 3 per cent on Monday after the firm reported almost a flat net profit of Rs 18,645 crore for the third quarter, as a decline in gas production and weakness in its retail business offset gains in other segments.

The blue-chip stock edged lower by 3.04 per cent to settle at Rs 1,413.25 on the BSE. During the day, it dropped 3.72 per cent to Rs 1,403.30.

At the NSE, the stock went down by 3 per cent to end at Rs 1,413.60. During the day, it slipped 3.74 per cent to Rs 1,403.30.

The company's market valuation eroded by Rs 60,016.51 crore to Rs 19,12,476.70 crore.

The heavyweight stock was the biggest laggard among the 30-share BSE Sensex firms.

Decline in the stock was a major contributor in dragging the markets lower. The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 324.17 points or 0.39 per cent to settle at 83,246.18. The 50-share NSE Nifty declined 108.85 points or 0.42 per cent to 25,585.50.

Reliance Industries' Q3 earnings were announced on Friday post-market hours.

The country's largest conglomerate saw muted earnings growth in the retail business on GST rate rationalisation, demerger of consumer product business and distribution of festive buying split between two quarters. This offset healthy margins, driving energy and digital businesses.

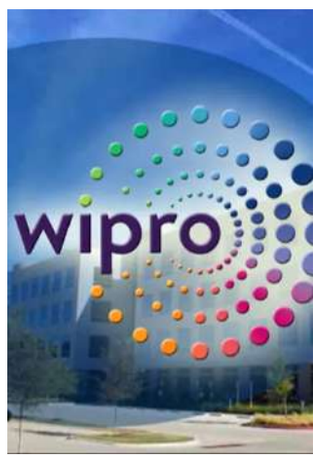
- Shares of Reliance Industries Ltd declined 3 per cent on Monday after the firm reported almost a flat net profit of Rs 18,645 crore for the third quarter, as a decline in gas production and weakness in its retail business offset gains in other segments. The blue-chip stock edged lower by 3.04 per cent

Its consolidated net profit of Rs 18,645 crore, or Rs 13.78 per share, in October-December - the third quarter of the current 2025-26 fiscal year - compared to Rs 18,540 crore, or Rs 13.70 per share a year back, according to a company statement. —*PTI*

7% PROFIT DECLINE

Wipro shares tank nearly 10% after profits fall in Q3

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN



Shares of IT services major Wipro tanked nearly 10 per cent on Monday after the firm reported a 7 per cent decline in consolidated net profit in the third quarter of FY26.

The stock tumbled 9.54 per cent to Rs 241.75 on the BSE.

At the NSE, it dropped sharply by 9.68 per cent to Rs 241.55.

The company's earnings were announced post-market hours on Friday.

Wipro on Friday reported a 7 per cent decline in consolidated net profit to Rs 3,119 crore in the third quarter of FY26, weighed down by one-off restructuring charges and labour code implementations.

The Bengaluru-headquartered company had posted a net profit (attributable to equity holders of the company) of Rs 3,353.8 crore in the year-ago period.

Wipro recorded a one-time provisional impact of Rs 302.8 crore from the implementation of the new labour codes.

Wipro's larger peers -- TCS, Infosys, and HCLTech -- have also taken significant hits from the new labour codes in their Q3 FY26 earnings.

The October-December quarter also witnessed a one-time cost impact of Rs 263 crore for Wipro on account of a now-completed restructuring exercise. —*PTI*

TARIFF CONCERNS LOOM

Markets succumb to selling pressure amid weak global cues

MUMBAI, 19 JAN

Stock market benchmarks Sensex and Nifty ended lower on Monday, tracking deep losses in heavyweights Reliance Industries, Eternal, and ICICI Bank amid rising geopolitical tensions and renewed global tariff concerns.

Besides, subdued quarterly results, ongoing weakness in the rupee and unabated flight of foreign capital from Indian equities also made investors jittery, traders said.

Amid cautious investor sentiment, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 324.17 points, or 0.39 per cent, to settle at 83,246.18. During the day, it tumbled 672.04 points, or 0.80 per cent, to 82,898.31.

A total of 3,074 stocks declined, while 1,227 advanced and 182 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The 50-share NSE Nifty declined 108.85 points, or 0.42 per cent, to 25,585.50.

Despite a weak start, buying interest emerged at lower levels, helping the indices to stage a modest recovery.

"Indian equity markets traded in a narrow range with a cautious undertone, as tariff-related concerns and geopolitical uncertainties kept global investors on edge. Fresh threats from US President Donald Trump over additional tariffs on select European countries triggered a global risk-off mood, which weighed on domestic sentiment.

Eternal, Titan, Adani Ports, Tata Consultancy Services and UltraTech Cement were also among the laggards.

However, InterGlobe Aviation, Tech Mahindra, Hindustan Unilever and Bajaj Finance were among the gainers. While the BSE smallcap gauge dropped 1.28 per cent, the midcap index dipped 0.43 per cent. —*PTI*

Bharat Coking Coal shares skyrocket 77% on mkt debut

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

Shares of Bharat Coking Coal Ltd on Monday made a bumper stock market debut and ended with a premium of nearly 77 per cent, commanding a market valuation of Rs 18,935 crore.

The stock was listed at Rs 45.21, a steep premium of 96.56 per cent from the issue price of Rs 23 on the BSE. Later, it ended at Rs 40.66, reflecting a surge of 76.78 per cent.

At the NSE, the stock made its market debut at Rs 45, up 95.65 per cent. Shares of the firm ended at Rs 40.58, registering a jump of 76.43 per cent.

The company's market valuation stood at Rs 18,935.36 crore.

The sharp jump in the stock came on a day when the equity markets faced selling pressure. The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 324.17 points or 0.39 per cent to settle at 83,246.18. The 50-share NSE Nifty dropped 108.85 points or 0.42 per cent to 25,585.50.

The initial public offering of Bharat Coking Coal Ltd was subscribed to a massive 146.81 times on the final day of bidding on Tuesday last week, led by heavy investors' participation. —*PTI*

SILVER AND GOLD SCALE FRESH RECORD HIGHS

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

Silver prices surged Rs 10,000 on Monday to breach the record Rs 3 lakh-per-kilogram mark in the national capital, driven by strong demand in domestic and global markets, according to marketmen.

The white metal traded at Rs 3,02,600 per kilogram on Monday against the previous closing level of Rs 2,92,600 per kg.

Gold prices also witnessed robust gains in the local bullion market and scaled a fresh record. The yellow metal climbed Rs 1,900 to Rs 1,48,100 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes). It had finished at Rs 1,46,200 per 10 grams on Friday. —*PTI*

ICICI Bank shares down over 2% post Q3 earnings

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

Shares of ICICI Bank on Monday ended over 2 per cent lower after the private sector lender said its consolidated net profit for the December 2025 quarter declined 2.68 per cent.

The stock dipped 2.26 per cent to settle at Rs 1,379.80 on the BSE. During the day, it declined 3.65 per cent to Rs 1,360 apiece.

At the NSE, the stock edged lower by 2.14 per cent to close at Rs 1,380.60. During the day, it dropped by 3.60 per cent to Rs 1,360 per share.

The company's market valuation eroded by Rs 22,566.78 crore to Rs 9,86,857.93 crore.

The decline in the stock was a major drag on the equity markets on Monday.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 324.17 points or 0.39 per cent to settle at 83,246.18. The 50-share NSE Nifty declined 108.85 points or 0.42 per cent to 25,585.50. The company's earnings were announced on Saturday.

It had posted a consolidated net profit of Rs 12,883.37 crore for October-December period in 2024 and Rs 13,537.06 crore July-September quarter of this fiscal. —*PTI*

IMF UPGRADES 2026 WORLD ECONOMY OUTLOOK TO 3.3%

WASHINGTON, 19 JAN

An unexpectedly sturdy world economy is likely to shrug off US President Donald Trump's protectionist trade policies this year, thanks partly to a surge of investment in artificial intelligence in North America and Asia, the International Monetary Fund said in a report out Monday.

The global funding organisation expects global growth to be 3.3 per cent this year, same as in 2025 but up from the 3.1 per cent it had forecast for 2026.

The world economy "shows resilience despite US-led trade disruptions," IMF economists wrote in a blog post accompanying the latest update in the fund's World Economic Outlook. —*PTI*

Asus halts phone launches, focuses on AI PCs

TAIPEI, 19 JAN

Asus has announced it will pause all phone launches in 2026, effectively shelving its popular ROG Phone and ZenFone series as it pivots towards artificial intelligence and commercial computing solutions.

During a recent event in Taipei, the company's chairman discussed the decision to shift focus away from smartphones in favour of AI-centric systems, robotics, and automated computing devices. The shift in strategy aligns with a broader trend among tech giants reassessing their business models in light of increasing AI demand. Asus plans to invest in AI servers that will support various AI models, believing that these systems will drive future growth more effectively than smartphone sales.

While the company is stepping back from the mobile market, it reassured existing customers that service and updates for current ROG Phone and ZenFone models will continue. With a strong presence in the PC segment, Asus aims to remain relevant by catering to the demand for AI-compatible hardware. —*Agencies*

FY26 GDP growth of 7.3 pc to help boost household income: Moody's

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

Moody's Ratings on Monday projected India's economy to grow by 7.3 per cent in the current financial year, saying strong expansion will raise household incomes and boost demand for insurance products.

In a report on India's insurance sector, Moody's said sustained economic growth, rising digitisation, tax changes and planned reforms in the state-owned insurance sector are set to drive solid premium growth and improve the industry's currently weak profitability.

Moody's expects GDP growth of 7.3 per cent in FY2025 (year ending March 2026), up from 6.5 per cent in the previous year. In 2024–25, GDP per capita rose 8.2 per cent year on year to USD 11,176.

The agency said strong economic momentum helped total insurance premium revenue rise 17 per cent to Rs 10.9 lakh crore during April–November 2025–26, with health insurance premiums growing 14 per cent and new life business premiums climbing 20 per cent. This marked acceleration from 2024–25, when premiums grew 7 per cent. —*PTI*

'RESILIENCE MUST FOR GROWTH'

Global supply chains enter era of structural volatility: WEF

DAVOS, 19 JAN

Global supply chains have entered an era of structural volatility, forcing companies and governments to re-evaluate how and where they invest and produce, a new report said on Monday.

According to the report by the World Economic Forum (WEF), three in four business leaders are now prioritising resilience as a driver of growth.

The report, released ahead of its annual meeting 2026 here, said this volatility reflects a fundamental rewiring of global value chains, driven by geopolitics, industrial policy, the energy transition and technological acceleration.

In 2025 alone, the escalation of tariffs between major economies reshuffled more than USD 400 billion in global trade flows, while disruptions across major shipping routes pushed container shipping costs up by 40 per cent on year-on-year basis, signalling a decisive move away from short-term shocks towards enduring uncertainty.

The study cited a use case from India on Tamil Nadu's stable and predictable investment climate, saying the state has become one of India's most reliable industrial destinations with political stability, consistent regulation, tailored incentives, strong infrastructure and skilled talent.

The scale of the shift is already evident. —*PTI*

Top expert says India on right track with AI

It's time to embrace AI or die, be it individuals, corporates or governments, and India appears to be on the right track with artificial intelligence, says Jack Hidary CEO of SandboxAQ, Offering huge potential for Indian companies to scale up to global levels, he says that it was born at Google's Alphabet Inc as a moonshot unit and is now an independent and influential entity. Hidary launched a sandbox or research group on AI and quantum technologies at Alphabet in 2016, which was spun off into an independent company in 2022. Sandbox typically refers to a secure and live testing environment and draws its name from a child's sandbox, where children can build, experiment with or even destroy sand formations without causing any damage to the real world. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Aus vs Pak: Cummins, Maxwell & Hazlewood rested

KARACHI, 19 JAN

Australia will rest five top players, including Pat Cummins and Glenn Maxwell, for a three-match Twenty20 series in Pakistan ahead of the World Cup, selectors said Monday.Josh Hazlewood, Tim David, and Nathan Ellis will also skip the series starting later this month.Their absence opened the door to fringe players Sean Abbott, Mahli Beardman, Ben Dwarshuis, Jack Edwards, Mitch Owen, Josh Phillippe, and Matt Renshaw, who come into the 17-man squad.Chief selector George Bailey said the five were either returning from injury or having their loads managed ahead of the T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka, which begins on 7 February."The series is a great opportunity for those on the brink of selection and some young players we rate highly for valuable experience," he added."Some are already experienced international players, along with Mahli Beardman.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Bhagat and Sukant win two gold each in Para Badminton

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

India's Pramod Bhagat and Sukant Kadam clinched a gold medal each in the singles events of their respective categories and then combined to stand on top of the podium in doubles at the SPIRO SPATHIS Egypt Para Badminton International 2026 in Cairo. Bhagat showcased grit and experience in the SL3 men's singles final, defeating compatriot Umesh Vikram Kumar in a thrilling three-set contest. After conceding a closely-fought opening game 19-21, Bhagat raised his intensity and tactical sharpness to take the next two sets 21-15 and 21-13, sealing victory in a match lasting over an hour. —*PTI*

Inaugural Kabaddi Champions League from 25Jan -7Feb

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

The inaugural Kabaddi Champions League (KCL) will be held from January 25 to February 7 at the Sports University of Haryana, Rai, the organisers informed on Monday. The KCL has officially announced the match schedule for the inaugural season. Over 12 days, eight franchises Sonipat Stars, Gurugram Gurus, Hisar Heroes, Bhiwani Bulls, Rohtak Royals, Karnal Kings, Panipat Panthers, and Faridabad Fighters will battle it out in a tightly packed league format.—*PTI*

Khelo India Winter Games 2026 begin today in Leh

LEH, 19 JAN

More than 1000 athletes will take part in the Ladakh leg of the 2026 Khelo India Winter Games starting in Leh on Tuesday. The Nawang Dorjan Stobdan (NDS) Stadium, the Army rink, and the frozen Gupukh's Pond will be the centres of attraction till the Games end on 26 January. The opening ceremony of KIWG 2026 will take place on Tuesday afternoon. Four hundred and seventy-two athletes will take part in two ice sports skating and hockey. The new attraction this year has been the introduction of figure skating, an Olympic event. In the Ladakh leg of KIWG last year, the hosts ended on top of the medals tally with four gold out of 13.—*PTI*

Indian Shuttlers eye challenging draw at Indonesia Masters

JAKARTA, 19 JAN

Indian shuttlers would eye a drastic improvement after last week's disappointing home run when they go up against a demanding draw at the USD 500,000 Indonesia Masters, which gets underway here on Tuesday.

At the India Open in New Delhi last week, Lakshya Sen bowed out in the men's singles quarterfinals, while no Indian progressed beyond the last eight in any category as Chinese Taipei's Lin Chun-Yi and world number one An Se Young of Korea clinched the men's and women's singles titles, respectively.

The focus now shifts to Jakarta, where Indian shuttlers will face a challenging line-up in the opening rounds with several tough ties against higher-ranked opponents.

Seventh seed Lakshya, who won the Australian Open last year, will be hurting after his run atthe India Open was cut short by Lin in the last eight stage.

He will look to make a good start when he opens his campaign against Singapore's Jia Heng Jason Teh, while HS Prannoy faces a stern test against Malaysia's former world No. 2 and Paris Olympics bronze-medallist Lee Zii Jia.

Former world No. 1 Kidambi Srikanth, who reached the finals at Malaysia Masters and Syed Modi International last year, will take on Japan's Koki Watanabe, while Tharun Mannepalli is drawn against Yushi Tanaka of Japan.

US Open champion Ayush Shetty has been handed a tough draw against third seed Jonatan Christie of Indonesia, who reached the finals at the India Open.

After a disappointing first-round exit at the India Open, it will be yet another tough outing for the 20-year-old.

In women's singles, fifth seed PV Sindhu, who started the season after recovering from a foot injury, will begin her campaign against Japan's Manami Suizu.

World No. 12 Sindhu endured a first-round exit at the India Open after going down to Vietnam's World No. 23 Nguyen Thuy Linh.

The young and promising Tanvi Sharma, a junior world Championships silver-medallist, is drawn against fourth seed Tomoka Miyazaki of Japan.

Sharma had produced a fearless show last week, coming close to beating Tokyo Olympics champion Chen Yu Fei before falling short in a three-game thriller. —*PTI*

PV Sindhu, HS prannoy and Lakshya Sen*PHOTO: PTI*

AO 2026: Djokovic romps to 100th win in Melbourne

Djokovic, 38, tamed Spain's 71st-ranked Pedro 6-3, 6-2, 6-2

MELBOURNE, 19 JAN

Novak Djokovic began his latest bid for a record 25th Grand Slam crown with an emphatic straight-sets victory on Monday.

Serbian great Djokovic, 38, tamed Spain's 71st-ranked Pedro Martinez 6-3, 6-2, 6-2 on Rod Laver Arena, a court where he has won a record 10 Australian Open crowns. The world number four owns 24 major titles, equal to the most ever with Australia's Margaret Court, but a 25th has remained agonisingly out of reach. His last came at the 2023 US Open, with Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz sharing all eight since then.

"What can I say? I like the sound of it. Centurion is pretty nice," he said after his 100th victory at the Australian Open. "I always give my best whenever I'm on the court.

Iga Swiatek overcomes Yuan Yue

Iga Swiatek knows she has plenty to work on in her bid for a first Australian Open title and a career Grand Slam.

The No. 2-ranked Swiatek never got comfortable in a 7-6 (5), 6-3 win over No. 130-ranked Chinese qualifier Yuan Yue in the first-round on Monday night. After winning Wimbledon last year to go with her four French Open titles and her victory at the 2022 U.S. Open, the Australian Open is the only major missing from her collection. She has twice reached the semifinals. Yuan was swinging freely and rifling winners as she took a 5-3 lead, and Swiatek had to switch things up.

"I was a bit rusty at the beginning," she said. "Many ups and downs, but overall, I have some stuff to work on. I'll just focus on that."

Cilic starts with a thumping win over Altmaier; Wawrinka beats Djere

Former Australian Open finalist Marin Cilic turned back the clock with a ruthless display to beat Germany's Daniel Altmaier 6-0, 6-0, 7-6(3) in the first round at Melbourne Park on Monday.

The towering 37-year-old won the opening 12 games with minimum fuss to spark chatter of a rare Grand Slam main draw "triple bagel", which has been achieved by only five players in the professional era. —*PTI*

WOMEN'S PREMIER LEAGUE

Struggling Mumbai Indians, Delhi Capitals eye revival

VADODARA, 19 JAN

Defending champions Mumbai Indians will be desperate to arrest their slide and revive their campaign when they take on an equally struggling Delhi Capitals in a Women's Premier League match here on Tuesday.

The Harmanpreet Kaur-led side has managed just two wins from five outings so far and has looked off the pace for large parts of the season.

They began with a loss to Royal Challengers Bengaluru, before thrashing bottom-placed Delhi Capitals by 50 runs in the reverse fixture after defending 195.

Wins over Gujarat Giants by seven wickets offered some momentum, but back-to-back defeats against UP Warriorz -- failing to defend 161/5 and then falling short while chasing 188 -- forced them to play catch-up, even as they hung on to No. 2 spot in the five-team standings.

MI's biggest concern has been their powerplay returns.

Hayley Matthews' delayed comeback from injury and experimentation with Amelia Kerr and G Kamalini at the top have left them with their lowest powerplay run rate of the tournament (6.50).

The onus thus has fallen heavily on skipper Harmanpreet and Nat Sciver-Brunt, and MI have struggled whenever the duo have not produced substantial scores.

Frequent chopping and changing in the XI, including Matthews moving in and out, Kamalini being shuffled down the order, and pace spearhead Shabnim Ismail sitting out, has added to the sense of instability.

Their fielding too has been below par, with 10 dropped catches in five matches, hurting them at crucial stages.

On the other hand, last season's runners-up, Delhi Capitals, are rooted to the bottom of the table with three losses from four matches. They opened their campaign with successive defeats, first against the Mumbai Indians and then against the Gujarat Giants, when they fell just short while chasing 210. Match starts: 7.30 pm. —*PTI*

NO REST, GILL TO PLAY PUNJAB'S RANJI GAME FROM THURSDAY

BENGALURU, 19 JAN

India Test and ODI captain Shubman Gill has decided against taking a break after the recent 50-over loss to New Zealand and will play the next Ranji Trophy game for Punjab against Saurashtra at Rajkot, starting Thursday.

Gill, who featured in all three ODIs in the just-concluded series that India lost 1-2, has chosen to return to red-ball cricket immediately as he is not part of India's T20 World Cup squad.

The 26-year-old is keen to help Punjab keep their slim knockout hopes alive in the premier domestic tournament.

"Shubman decided against taking any break post ODI series, and it took him eight hours to reach Rajkot from Indore as there aren't any direct flights available," a source close to the Punjab team told PTI.

Punjab is currently placed sixth in Group B with 11 points from five matches.

With three league games still to be played, the former champions would need outright victories in all their remaining fixtures to harbour any realistic chance of making it to the knockout stage.Gill's presence at the top of the order is therefore seen as crucial to Punjab's ambitions. The match against Saurashtra, the reigning domestic heavyweights, will also mark Gill's first red-ball appearance since he sustained a neck injury during the Test series against South Africa, which ruled him out of competitive cricket for a lengthy period. —*PTI*

NZ proud of historic India series win: Mitchell

INDORE, 19 JAN

Daryl Mitchell on Monday says New Zealand's historic triumph was built on calm decision-making under pressure and collective belief, as the visitors sealed their first-ever bilateral ODI series victory on Indian soil.

India threatened to nail a stiff chase of 338 with a key partnership between centurion Virat Kohli and Harshit Rana, but fell short once the stand broke in the series-deciding third game here on Sunday. Mitchell admitted the pressure was real and praised his team's composure. "They had a really good partnership, and there was a lot of pressure, especially considering the nature of this ground, the surface, and the size of the dimensions," Mitchell, who scored 137, said.

India never began well: Gavaskar

Former captain Sunil Gavaskar says India's failure to make good starts cost them the ODI series against New Zealand, and the team's batters should take a leaf out of Virat Kohli's book to understand how an innings should be paced while chasing difficult targets.

India went down in the third and final ODI in Indore by 41 runs to lose their first-ever 50-over home series against New Zealand, continuing the trend of recent underwhelming results. Kohli top-scored with a 108-ball 124 but could not get a stable partner to steer the challenging chase of 338.

"Unless Virat Kohli got substantial support, it was always going to be difficult, and he got very little of it. —*PTI*

T20 WORLD CUP PARTICIPATION

Final call on B'desh to be taken on 21 Jan

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

The ICC has asked the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) to decide on its participation in the T20 World Cup in India by 21 January or "risk being replaced by another team" in the tournament beginning 7 February.

Despite the back and forth between ICC and BCB, no solution has been found to the crisis that was triggered by the removal of Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman from the 2026 Indian Premier League on BCCI's instructions for unspecified "developments all around."

"The BCB officials have been told to decide on the participation by 21 January. If they refuse to travel to India, then they should be ready to be replaced by another team as per rankings," said an ICC source. —*PTI*

Tata Steel Masters: Praggnanandhaa loses again; Gukesh and Erigaisi held to draws

MOSCOW, 19 JAN

Defending champion R. Praggnanandhaa lost his second game in as many days, going down to Nodirbek Abdusattorov from Uzbekistan, while D. Gukesh was held to a draw by Netherlands' Jorden van Foreest in the Tata Steel Masters Chess here.Having been at the top of his game for a major part of 2025, Praggnanandhaa seemed to be running low on steam as a drawn endgame turned into a painful loss against the Uzbek on Sunday.

With no points to show after the first two games, Praggnanandhaa is at the bottom of the table and will have to make a strong comeback in the remaining 11 rounds to pose a challenge.

Meanwhile, world champion Gukesh took his tally to one point following his second draw. After defeating Praggnanandhaa in the opener, Arjun Erigaisi tried to make a foray against Thai Dai Van Nguyen of the Czech Republic, but eventually failed to break the fortress.

The top-seeded Indian, however, remained in joint lead on 1.5 points in the company of Hans Moke Niemann of the United States and Abdusattorov.The fourth Indian in the fray, Aravindh Chithambaram, played out a draw with Yagiz Kaan Erdogmus of Turkey to also take his tally to one point out of a possible two. —*PTI*

NATIONAL SELECTION TRIALS

Aishwary, Manini top 50m rifle prone on first day

NEW DELHI, 19 JAN

World Championship silver medallist Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar and Manini Kaushik finished on top of the men's and women's 50m rifle 3P fields, respectively, on the first day of the Rifle/Pistol National Selection Trials 1&2 (Group A) here on Monday.

Manini topped the women's 50m rifle prone T1 with a total of 625.0, built on a composed and balanced series-by-series performance of 104.7, 104.2, 102.3, 104.6, 104.2, and 105.

Karnataka's Tilottama Sen finished second with 622.6, while Kerala's Vidarsa K Vinod was third on 622.0.

The depth of competition was evident with just 0.4 separating the athletes placed fifth to eighth.

Jharkhand's Supriya Kumari (621.7) finished fourth, ahead of the current national champion Priya of the Army Marksmanship Unit (620.7). Haryana's Nischal (620.6), Madhya Pradesh's Ashi Chouksey (620.5), and Punjab's Sift Kaur Samra (620.4) rounded off the top eight.

In the men's 50m rifle prone Trials 1, Aishwary stamped his authority early, finishing at the top with an impressive 629.6.

The 50m 3P national champion combined a high opening series with a controlled finish to create a clear buffer of 3.2 at the top with 105.3, 105.4, 105.7, 104.9, 103.7, and 104.6.

Former world champion Akhil Sheoran claimed second place with 626.4, while current national champion Swapnil Kusale finished third with 625.3. —*PTI*

SATADRU DUTTA GRANTED BAIL

KOLKATA, 19 JAN

A court in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district on Monday granted bail to Satadru Dutta, the organiser of the botched-up Messi event in the city last month.

Dutta was arrested on December 13 last year over alleged mismanagement in the Salt Lake stadium event on that day.

The judge of the Bidhannagar additional chief judicial magistrate (ACJM) granted bail to Dutta, the owner of the event management company that organised the event that descended into chaos on 13 December. —*PTI*